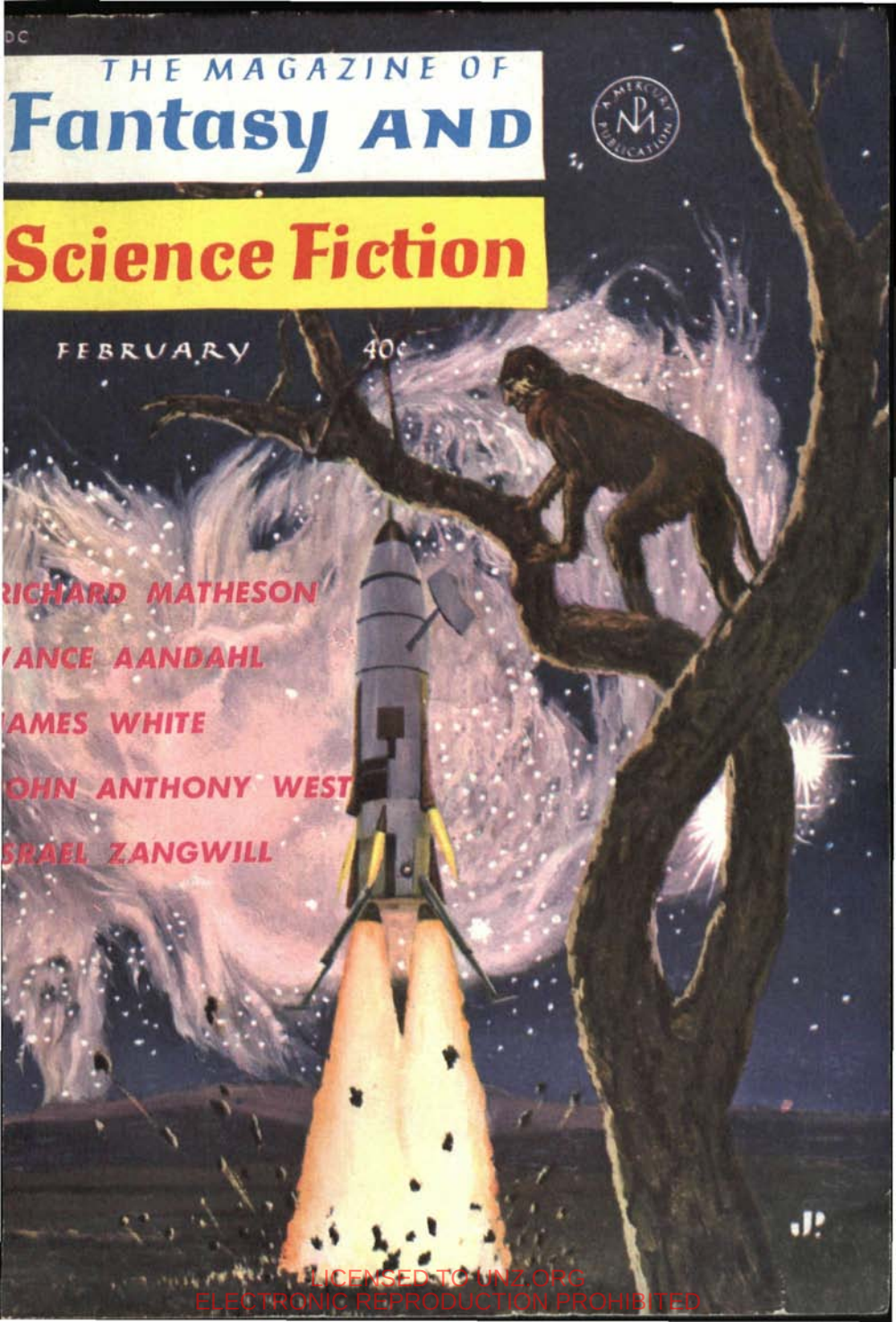

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Fantasy and Science Fiction

FEBRUARY *Including Venture Science Fiction*

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In this issue . . .

. . . **RICHARD MATHESON** returns to us, after an absence whose length we all regret (somewhat mitigated by our having another story of his in our inventory). **VANCE AANDAHL** strikes a blow for liberty and on behalf of a type of American we hope is not vanishing, viz. the local "character." New to us but not to our former sister-magazine, EQMM, is MWA Award-winner **ROBERT WALLSTEN**, who brings us up to date on gigolos. A fine, off-beat —and off-planet—story makes three for F&SF by **OTIS KIDWELL BURGER**. We have two Whites with us this time: **DON WHITE** of England, with a light-hearted and wicked little piece; and **JAMES WHITE** of Ulster, whose long story is a combination of SF and mystery; and **ROBERT SILVERBERG**'s brief and pointed item, which might be called, if we were a spelling-reformer, Science Filosophy. Readers who remember (and who can forget?) **JOHN ANTHONY WEST**'s sardonic report of the husband who atrophied while his wife fluttered and nattered will not want to miss his newest mordant story of matrimony. And lastly is the antique splendor of the late and illustrious **ISRAEL ZANGWILL**'s account of G-d, Man, and Devil in a vanished London.

THIS MONTH'S COVER depicts an unmanned exploratory rocket landing on a hypothetical planet. The gaseous clouds are the great nebulae in the constellation Orion. They take the planet out of our solar system.

Coming next month . . .

. . . and under full steam, is **RICHARD McKENNA**, CPO, USN (Ret.), whose stories you have seen here twice before—and whose new mainstream novel (a sure best seller) has been taken by the SEPost, Book Of The Month Club, and the movies—with an SF novel neatly blending love, combat and ecology. Also a nautical note: the first F&SF story by **HARRY HARRISON**—screamingly funny—is about an old-time Royal Navy captain named Honorio Harpplayer. Nuff sed?

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"Why is everybody fond of Vance Aandahl?" a disgruntled and unsolicited question asked recently, via *our mail. The answer is, pretty simply, "Because he is a damned good writer, that's why." He says of his latest story that he "meant it to be subtle and elliptical, with intimations of fantasy—in a sense the old man represents everything that is romantic and imaginative in man, and his age and singularity represent the fact that these things are disappearing in our culture."* In a sense! *And in another sense, or other senses, we inquired, are there perhaps Allegories, References to Mythology, Hidden Meanings, in the story? Is the old man, say, Hercules? Or a Hercules, Southron Mountain style? All that we can say of young Mr. Aandahl's reply is that it was subtle and elliptical, with intimations of fantasy . . . What was the golden ring? What was the old man, then young, engaged in doing the night before Mr. "King" planned to fix him for good? Why is he now "dressed all in tattercloth"? And why is it that he never seems to eat? What is the meaning of his laughter? Why is he so fond of* apples? *Why don't you read this story and try to find out?*

THE RIDDLE SONG

by Vance Aandahl

THERE ONCE WAS A MAN dressed all in tattercloth. He sat on the curbs of the city, smoking five cent cigars from morning to night, but where he slept I do not know. He was an old man, with yellow eyelids and soft gray eyes that seemed to melt away when I looked at them. Sometimes he would clap his gnarled hands together, open his toothless mouth, and laugh. Sometimes he would talk to himself, slowly and with great dignity. Sometimes he would sing . . . "I just sit here in the noonday sun . . ."

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Then we would come to him, running from the vacant lots and candy stores and sunlit places of summer, sprawling around his feet in the hot gutter, gazing wordlessly up at his cracked lips . . .

"I just sit here in the noonday sun . . .
And when they come to get me,
I'll hit them with sticks,
And I won't eat my vegetables,
And I'll grow skinny as a marble . . ."

And if we were quiet, he would smile at us and sing the song again. But if we giggled or tried to talk to him, his lips would clamp around the stub of a cigar and he would stare resolutely over our heads, as though we didn't exist, puffing up a wall of smoke between his face and the world.

One day, when I was alone, I approached him with an apple in my hand. Squatting down and gazing at his face, I began to shine the red fruit on my shirt. He puffed on his cigar and glanced quickly at my hands.

"That's an apple, hain't it?"

"Yes."

"Like apples?"

"Yes."

"Now don't laugh at me, boy."

"I wasn't going to."

"I sure like apples. Myself."

"Me too. Want some?"

"No tricks now, boy."

"You gotta sing me a song. A new song."

"Don't know any new songs."

He chewed on the butt of the cigar and glared at the apple. Then he smiled such a smile that his eyes squinted shut and his gums showed from cheek to cheek. I could hear him wheezing out a little laughter deep down in his throat.

"Maybe you'd like an old song. Would you like that?"

"I don't know."

"Promise I get the apple."

"Not unless I like the song." I tossed the shining red fruit from hand to hand, watching his eyes follow it back and forth. Then I held it up to my nose, crossed my eyes, and licked my lips.

"Now, hold on, boy. I'll sing you a good song."

I nodded my head and leaned back on the cement, fondling the apple and waiting for him to begin. He pulled the cigar from his mouth with two stub fingers and pursed his lips at me. But then he smiled again, and his shaggy little head bounced up and down with laughter . . .

"Good morning, Mr. King!
Good morning, Mr. King!
Good morning, Mr. King!
I took a drink from your morning spring,
A-running through a yellow gold ring;
Within your garden it was done,
Yesterday night and in tomorrow's sun!"

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He returned his cigar to its home, brushed a fly off his forehead, and clapped his hands.

"Now give me that apple, boy, 'cause that's a good one!"

"I didn't like it."

"Why?"

"It didn't make sense."

"That's 'cause it's a riddle song."

"What's a riddle song?"

"That's a song that don't make sense. You gotta figure it out."

"I won't give you my apple until you tell me what it means."

"Nobody knows what it means."

"God does."

"Sure, but people don't."

"Mother told me that God knows everything."

"Hain't you gonna give me that apple?"

"Mother told me that God knows everything and I better be careful what I do and not talk to old men." I got up and ran away from him, down the sidewalk and into a vacant lot whose weed jungles were the children's realm. Two of my friends were already there, hidden behind a wooden stump.

"We saw you!"

"Yeah, we saw you!"

I tossed my apple in the air and caught it with one hand and a smirk.

"Think you're pretty smart, don't you? Talking to the old man all by yourself. He'll grab you and put you in a bag."

"Well," I said, lying down next to them in the dirt, "I'm not afraid."

"I'm not either!" said the bigger of the two, a fat boy named Roger who told everybody else what to do.

"Yeah, but you know what Daddy said," warned his little brother, Bobby.

"Don't be a nincompoop!" growled Roger.

"Guess what he did." I looked at them out of the corner of my eye.

"What?" asked Roger, staring over the stump and down the street.

"He sang a new song. It was better than the other one."

"The other one's funny. He's a funny old man."

"This one was a riddle song."

"What's that?"

"I don't know. Nobody knows in the whole world. Except God."

"Do you think he'll sing it for us?" asked Bobby.

"Don't be a nincompoop!" hissed his brother, pushing him aside. "We got more important stuff to do than listen to a funny old man."

"He'll sing it for you," I whispered, "if you give him an apple."

"We don't got an apple."

"I've got an apple."

"Give it to me!"

"What'll you trade me for it?"

"I don't got anything, but I'll let you hit Bobby."

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"No!" Bobby squealed and scrambled away.

"Aw, come back," yelled his brother. "I was just joking." He turned to me and smiled proudly. "I was just joking."

"What'll you trade me?"

"I don't know. An apple ain't worth much."

"Okay. I guess I'll just go over there and talk to him by myself."

"We'll come too. Com'on, Bobby."

The old man was still sitting on the curb, smoking a new cigar and fingering the remnants of one shoe. He didn't look up at us, but when we got close, the toes of his bare foot started to wiggle with excitement.

"Hi!" said Roger, plopping down in the gutter. "We got an apple. See?"

The old man looked up and focused his watery eyes on us. Then he saw the apple in my hand, and smiled.

"Sure like apples!"

"Sing us a song and we'll give it to you!" cried Roger. "Sing us the new one!"

"Apples are good," I said.

"You hain't gonna give me that apple."

"Yes we are!" yelled Roger.

"Nope. And I hain't gonna sing no songs for you." He looked over our heads and started to puff on his cigar.

"I'll show you," growled Roger, kicking the old man in the shin. He darted back as fast as a fat boy can, but he waan't fast enough. The old man's hand caught him around the neck and the next thing I knew, Roger's fat bottom was facing the sun and must have been twice as hot. When the old man finished the spanking, Roger didn't even bother to pull up his jeans: he just ran for home, stumbling along with Bobby right behind him. For a moment, the old man glared after them; but then he started to chuckle. And when he'd chuckled for awhile, he started to laugh. He laughed and laughed and just kept right on laughing; and every time he laughed, his little head bounced up and down on his shoulders and his tattercloth coat flapped out like brown wings. He must have laughed for a minute or more. Then he turned his head and looked at me.

"You're not afraid, are you?"

"No," I stammered, "I came back to give you your apple." Trembling a little, I handed him the fruit. He slipped it out of my hand, held it up in the light, and then dropped it into his pocket.

"Why don't you eat it?"

"Can't. Don't got no teeth." He took a puff on his cigar. "Jest wanted to have it, that's all."

"What's your name?"

"Don't have a name. Jest songs and an apple."

"Don't you? Really?"

"Guess I do." He rubbed his

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forehead and smiled. "Don't matter."

We sat in silence for a moment. He put his shoe back on and I ran a finger across the bumpy asphalt of the street, wondering. Then I looked up at him again.

"Tell me about the song."

"'Bout Mr. King?"

"Yes."

"Mr. King was the richest man in the world when I was a young boy. Had a big house in the mountains, up in the pine trees. Had fifty big hogs. Had a daughter named Morning Spring and so pretty the whole country looked up when she rode by. Myself, I warn't much but a rambling boy, but I went up there and got me one of them hogs. Mr. King and his boys chased me three days and three nights with their coon dogs, but I was sitting in the pines eating hog eye, happy as a cat. Don't remember how, but they finally caught me. Took me back to his big house and told me he was gonna hang me next morning. Next morning came and I sang him my riddle song."

"What happened?"

"Had to let me go. Didn't know the riddle."

"Really?"

"Yep. Good riddle. Hard riddle."

"But what does it mean?"

"Used to know, but I forgot."

He scratched his nose and took the cigar from his mouth.

"Good morning, Mr. King!
Good morning, Mr. King!
Good morning, Mr. King!
I took a drink from your morning spring,
A-running through a yellow gold ring;
Within your garden it was done,
Yesterday night and in tomorrow's sun!"

"Okay, what's going on here?" An ominous voice intruded on the old man's song. Looking up, I saw Roger's father gazing down at us. Standing behind him were his two boys.

"That's him, Dad!" screamed Roger. "That's the dirty nincompoop that beat me up!"

"What about this?" boomed his father. "Did you hit my son?"

The old man slapped his hands together, stared straight forward, and clouded the air with smoke.

"Crazy old timer," muttered Roger's father. Then he turned to me in anger. "Now you get out of here before you get hurt too! Go on, all of you, scat!"

We ran down the street and hid in the vacant lot where we could watch. Roger's father paced around the old man, talking at a tremendous pace and waving a threatening finger under his nose. The old man smoked his cigar.

A few minutes later, a police car arrived. Roger's father talked to the policemen, and the policemen talked to the old man. He re-

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mained steadfast and silent behind his wall of smoke. One of them scooped him up by the armpits and put him on his feet. He collapsed in the gutter, where he lay resting on one elbow, his cigar still intact, his face grimly set with determination.

Roger's mother arrived and began to harangue the policemen. Roger's father told her to go home (this I could hear, even at a distance), and she burst into tears. The policemen seemed puzzled and a little disgruntled. Finally, they each grabbed an arm and a leg and lifted the old man from his resting place. I saw his face for a moment: his eyes were clamped shut and his cigar was bobbing up and down like a hummingbird. I knew that he was laughing. They tossed him in the back seat of their car, exchanged a few more words with Roger's parents, and drove away.

"Boy," said Roger, "I bet they put that crazy nincompoop in the electric chair!"

I thought about Mr. King and chuckled to myself. But I never saw the old man again.

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The Atlantic Packet-boat having been delayed by unseasonal storms, we are unable, in this case, to provide our readers with the customary budgetful of intelligence concerning the author. Until our ace agent, Mr. Pettifogle (now tempest-tossed some several hundred leagues off Cape Race), arrives, data on James White continues to be limited. He has appeared in F&SF before (CHRISTMAS TREASON, Jan. 1962), is the author of the SF novel, GENERAL HOSPITAL; and is chief salesman in the tailoring department of the largest department store in Belfast, Northern Ireland—more, we cannot now say. Except, of course, that his story is a very good one, and a tale of detection of a most unusual sort . . . Who is it that mutilates dolls, spits on stairs, steals tools from sealed cases, and slowly fills with a sense of peril the lonely and treasure-filled reaches of a department store at night?

COUNTER SECURITY

by James White

THE OBJECT LYING ON Mr. Steele's desk was the remains of a large, black plastic doll, Tully saw as he took the chair which the Store Manager indicated to him. The doll had lost a leg and both arms, one eye socket was empty and the nose had been pulled out of shape. There were also patches of hair missing from the scalp, and a narrow band of spotted material —the collar of the doll's dress, no doubt—still encircled its neck. Altogether it was an intriguing and rather pitiable object, Tully thought, but hardly the sort of thing to cause the Store Manager to send for the night security man as soon as he came on duty.

Tully was about to voice his curiosity when Steele's receptionist announced Tyson of Hardware and Dodds, the Toy buyer. The SM waited until they had stopped moving in their chairs, then cleared his throat and began to speak.

"In the ordinary way, Mr.

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Tully," he said in his soft, unhurried voice, "all cases of malicious damage to stock by members of the staff are dealt with by the departmental Buyer or floor supervisor and are not usually the concern of the night security people. Neither, I might add, are they the direct concern of the Store Manager, since I have slightly more important matters to occupy me."

His tone became gently sarcastic and he looked pointedly at the Toy buyer who looked at the carpet.

". . . However," he went on, "this seems to be an unusual case, in that neither Mr. Dodds or the supervisor on that floor have been able to do anything beyond establishing the fact that these occurrances do not take place during shop hours. Meanwhile the Toy department is being terrorised by an epidemic of armless dolls—"

"That sounds like an exaggeration," Dodds broke in quickly, strong emotion doubling the volume of his naturally loud voice, "but believe me it isn't! My staff are all girls, some of them coloured, and this sort of thing . . ."

The SM silenced Dodds with a coldly disapproving look. Mr. Steele detested all unnecessary noises. He liked to think of his Store as an efficient, smoothly-running machine and he was fond of reminding people that any part of it which operated loudly rendered its efficiency suspect.

"The retail value of the dolls is of no importance," Steele resumed. "What concerns us is the way in which the culprit can do such damage without being caught. That and the bad effect it is having on the Toy department staff. On the surface it looks like a practical joke, but—"

"A *joke!*" Dodds burst out. "I tell you my girls are terrified! At first they treated it as a joke, but then they kept finding them nearly every morning and the rumour started that there was a psychopath loose in the Store . . . !"

"Very *well*, Mr. Dodds," said the Store Manager irritably. "You tell it."

". . . Just look at the *facts!*" the Toy buyer rushed on, plainly too excited to notice the danger signals flying on the other side of the desk. "During the past two weeks nine dolls in all have been mutilated like this. Nine *black* dolls. All had a leg and both arms pulled off, the hair twisted or pulled out, the faces disfigured and their dresses torn off. One or two such incidents might be attributed to simple malicious damage, but nine of them in two weeks points to something much more sinister . . ."

Tully found himself looking at the doll, which no longer seemed such an innocent object, and thinking about the implications of the word *mutilate* as opposed to *damage.*

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". . . I'm not saying the rumour is true," Dodds went on, "but the facts support it. They point towards a perverted mind, a mind with some dreadful obsession about Negro dolls. I mean Negro girls . . ."

Dodds stopped for breath and the Store Manager rejoined the conversation. He said, "Despite what you have just heard, Mr. Tully, we are not faced with a general walkout. But the rumour is causing trouble and I want it killed. The quickest way to do that will be to find out who is pulling these dolls apart, and that is where you come in . . ."

It had already been established that whatever it was that happened was occurring outside of normal shop hours, Steele told him. The dolls were always found by staff arriving in the mornings, usually by the Cleaners, who were always first in. Either the culprit was someone, not necessarily a member of the staff, who was hiding in the store at night, or the Store was being broken into from the street. It was suggested that Mr. Tully keep a closer watch on the entrances to the Toy department . . .

A that point Tully felt like reminding him that the Store was reputed to be burglar-proof from the ground up, that the Toy department occupied the basement and that to gain access to it from the street would call for a fair-sized mining operation. He did not say anything, however, because the Store Manager knew these things as well as he did. And he noticed that the other had made no reference to his failure to notice anything peculiar going on during the past two weeks, when dolls must have been having their arms pulled off nearly every night. But now that the matter had been brought officially to his attention he knew that Steele would have plenty to say if he did not put a stop to it.

". . . This is an odd business whose solution may require a certain amount of imagination," the SM said, his eyes flicking briefly towards the inch or so of magazine showing in Tully's jacket pocket, "but then I see that that is something with which you are well supplied. Have you any questions?"

Before Tully could reply, Dodds broke in again. "Sir, you didn't mention the—"

That was as far as he got. Furiously, but still quietly, Steele said, "Mr. Dodds, there are some misdemeanors committed in this store which I, or Mr. Tully here, are *not* obliged to investigate personally, and complaints of people spitting on the back staircase is one of them . . . !"

More to take the heat off the loud-voiced but kindly Dodds than from any strong curiosity over the matter, Tully nodded towards the

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Hardware buyer and said, "What is Mr. Tyson's connection with this?"

"Eh? Oh, very slight," said Steele, regaining his composure with a visible effort. "He is having trouble with shortages. Some power tools, and a motorised lawnmower, missing from packing cases which have the manufacturer's seals unbroken. There is some kind of hanky panky going on, but pilfering at this end is not suspected so it is not a matter for you. He may also have come to lend moral support to Mr. Dodds, who is going to need it . . ."

He stood up suddenly, smiled and said, "Thank you, Mr. Tully." Then he began quietly to draw Dodds' attention to the Toy department's trading figures for the preceding week in comparison to the same week last year. This was a matter which Mr. Steele *was* obliged to investigate in person, and as Tully closed the office door softly behind him the inquisition was just beginning to warm up.

Tully walked slowly out onto the sales floor, trying to make his mind think in a positive and constructive manner and not succeeding at all. Around him stretched the polished, square ocean of the Hardware department with its bright display islands of Do-It-Yourself, electrical goods, refrigerators, *et al.* There were only a few customers about, it being only half an hour to closing time, and he decided to have a chat with the people in the Hardware stockroom. Steele had told him that the shortages did not concern him, but Tully disliked having his mind made up for him even when he knew that the other party was right.

A few minutes later he was getting all the details from Carswell, Tyson's assistant. Carswell was an extremely conscientious type who expected everybody else to be the same, and the fact that everybody else wasn't had had a bad effect on his disposition over the years.

"Either the packers were drunk or the maker is trying to pull a fast one," Carswell said hotly. Then tolerantly, for him, he went on, "There might be an excuse for three power-drills being missing from a case which was supposed to contain twenty—an error in packing, no doubt, because the maker's seals on the cases were unbroken. But when we told them about it they insisted that there was no error, that they had packed twenty power-drills and if their seals were intact then we had received and in due course would be billed for twenty power-drills. And the trouble is, we've been holding them in storage unopened for a couple of weeks, which weakens our case considerably . . ."

Except where they had been severed by Carswell's wire-cutters the thin metal bands sealing the

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cases were in one piece, smooth and shining apart from a few tiny discoloured sections which looked as if they were beginning to rust. The packing inside had fallen to the bottom of the case, but there was a suggestion of shaping to it as if the case had contained something which had been taken out rather than that the packing had merely been pushed into an empty case. For several minutes Tully poked around in it without quite knowing why, and lifted a handful up to his nose. It smelled of dust and dry straw and, vaguely, of peppermint, he thought, before he nearly blew over the case with the grandaddy of all sneezes.

Tully left Hardware and took the elevator to the ground floor, intending to ask some questions in the Toy department while its Buyer was still engaged with the Store Manager—he felt that he would get a more valuable reaction if he talked to the staff without Dodds shouting everybody down. But at the top of the basement stairs he changed his mind. There was another possibility which he should try to eliminate first.

When he reached the Nurse's Office a few minutes later he coughed gently in the manner of one intent on signalling one's presence rather than displaying symptoms of a respiratory malfunction. Through the frosted glass door which separated the tiny waiting room from the dispensary proper he saw a white shadow approach and resolve itself into the Nurse as the door was opened.

She looked down at him, the soft brown eyes in her rather severe face scanning him automatically for signs of physical injury or distress, then she said quietly, "Good Afternoon, Mr. Tully. Is something troubling you?"

"Well . . . yes," said Tully, standing up. He outlined what was troubling him, the Store Manager and a lot of other people, then ended awkwardly, ". . . Maybe I shouldn't ask this sort of question. I mean, what you find out or even guess at might be privileged information—I'm not sure what your position is in cases like this. But I was wondering if—"

"*If*," the Nurse broke in firmly, "there was anyone who came to see me who was as mentally disturbed as you and this rumour you mention suggests, I might or might not divulge his name. That would depend on the circumstances. I would, however, declare him unfit for work and immediately send him to his doctor, who would take over from there. I would not allow him to run around loose. Does that answer your question, Mr. Tully?"

"Thank you, Nurse," said Tully, and left.

The possibility of a Negro-hat-

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ing psychopath among the staff was not completely eliminated, he thought as he resumed his journey to the Toy department; all the talk with Nurse had proved was that the psychopath, if there was one, had not revealed himself to her.

On his way down the basement stairs Tully was caught by a stampeding mass of chattering femininity on their way up. It was quitting time, which meant that he wouldn't be able to ask the Toy girls any questions today. His only possible source of information seemed to be Miss Barr, Dodd's assistant, who was still standing by the model railway display putting on her outdoor face.

But he learned very little from his talk with her. According to Miss Barr every doll had been found in the same condition—missing both arms, one leg, one eye, the nose pulled out of shape, hair disarranged and clothing, if the doll had been wearing any, ripped off. The only minor variation was that sometimes it was the right and sometimes the left eye that had been poked out, just as it could be the right or left leg that was missing. When she began to grow agitated and started repeating herself, a condition highly unusual in the competent and level-headed Miss Barr, Tully made gentle reassuring noises, helped her on with her coat and said good-night.

When Tully was alone in the department he closed, bolted and locked the door at the top of the stairs, then he went on the prowl. His eyes missed nothing and he kept his lips pressed together so that he breathed in a long series of sniffs. This was routine, because his job required keen eyes and a very sensitive nose.

Few people realised that the Store, equipped as it was with the latest security devices and well covered by police patrols, was in no danger of being robbed, that the greatest and only danger was from fire. There was a sprinkler system installed, of course, which could be made so sensitive that a whole department could be instantly flooded—and its stock ruined, incidently—if someone switched on an electric fire. Or it could be made less sensitive so that a fire could gain an unbreakable hold which the spray from the ceiling would be unable to check. For despite its imposing facade the Store was one of the oldest buildings in the city, and much of its stock was even more inflammable than its structure.

So the primary job of the night security man was to guard against fire and the causes of fire. Every stockroom, locker room and cubbyhole—the only exceptions were the washrooms—had its No Smoking notices. But despite the eagle eyes of the Buyers and Floor Supervisors, the staff continued to

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sneak off for a smoke in all those places at every opportunity. Tully did not mind them smoking; the trouble arose when they were interrupted at it and were forced to hide the evidence quickly. They hid it in some very odd places, and the evidence smouldered sometimes for hours before Tully's nose led him to it and he rendered it safe.

On this occasion he was not simply looking for smouldering cigarette ends. He intended sealing the basement from outside and before he did so he had to be sure that there was nobody hiding in it. He looked behind and under every counter and display stand and with his Master opened every locker in the Toy staff room, and finally he was satisfied that the department was empty. He spent ten minutes then at the model railway display, taking the 4-6-2 tank loco around the layout and performing a few simple shunting operations, then he killed all the lights and headed for the Dugout.

The total floor area of the basement was only a fraction of that of the ground floor, it being merely two cellars joined by a narrow corridor. A floor plan of the basement resembled a dumb-bell with square weights, the square representing the Toy department being twice the size of the one enclosing the Dugout. In the middle of the corridor was a heavy swing door which was kept permanently dogged open. There were two lights in the corridor which he switched off as he passed them.

The Dugout was a large untidy room which served as the supply base and—unofficially—rest room for the cleaning staff. Drawn up in the centre of the room like some alien armoured division were the rubber-wheeled bogies which carried the electric polishers and vacuum cleaners, and ranged around the walls were storage cupboards filled with floor polish, liquid soap and an incredible quantity of rags, most of which were oily. Of all the places in the Store, this was the one in which a fire would be most likely to start. Tully searched and sniffed meticulously, as he did every night in this potential danger spot, but without finding either a hiding place or a trace of tobacco smoke. He gave a last look around, then mounted the ramp which replaced a stairway at this end to facilitate movement of the wheeled cleaners. He switched off the lights, then closed, locked and bolted the door from the outside.

An odd thing happened while he was locking the door. One of the keys in his bunch, the thin, lightweight Master for the Wages Office lockers, flipped up suddenly and stuck to the bar. A few minutes testing showed him that the bolt and surrounding casing of the Dugout door was strongly magnetised.

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If Tully had been asked to write down his thoughts just then he would have put down a row of question marks. He thought of checking to see if there was an electrician working late and asking him how and why the lock should have become magnetic, then decided that before doing anything else he should complete the sealing off of the basement.

Still keeping his eye on the two entrances to the basement he paid a quick visit to the Haberdashery counter and a cigarette and confectionery kiosk which were on the same floor. At Haberdashery he took a spool of black thread, leaving a chit with his signature on it stating that the goods were being used in the Store's business, and at the confectionery counter he opened a large packet of chewing gum. He thought of paying for this at first, but then reminded himself that he didn't *like* gum and he was chewing it solely in the line of duty. He left a chit for that, too, knowing full well that the people in accounting would have some very sarcastic things to say about it tomorrow. Tully grinned to himself and, chewing furiously, headed for the nearest basement door.

Fifteen minutes later the entrance to the Toy end of the basement was bolted both inside and out and had a length of black thread stretched across it approximately six inches from the floor level. The Dugout door had been similarly treated except that it was bolted and locked only from outside. He had also rigged threads at one-floor intervals on the staff stairway. The thread in each case was held by gum so that it would pull away rather than break, because there was a chance that his man might hear or feel a thread break and so have warning of the trap. Tully was assuming that any surreptitious movements which took place would be via the staff stairs, because the Store's main stairway, which wound around the central well and elevators, was kept brightly illuminated all through the night. It was also in sight of Tully's night station at the Book counter as well as being in full view of anyone passing the main entrance in the street.

As well, the staff stairway would be in total darkness while the main one would be lighted, so there was no reason for the men working late to break his threads. No innocent reason, that was.

With the feeling that he had taken all the precautions it was possible to take at that time, Tully began the first and most important of his six nightly rounds. Except for the well and the centre of light and activity where some display staff and carpenters were working on the Fashion Theatre, the Store was in darkness. The Floor Supervisor on Lock-up, whose job was also to keep tabs on

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the people working late, had already checked all doors and windows and killed the lights. Tully's first nightly duty was to make sure he had done these things properly, which he always had—floor supervisors were just as security minded as Tully himself, and none of them wanted to be caught out by the night man. It was a point of honour with them. Tully laughed wryly to himself as he paced the darkened sales floor, thinking that the competition which was fostered between departments—so fierce at times that it put an unfair strain on the word friendly—touched even the night watchman.

Gravely, Tully begged his own pardon; he meant the Night Security Officer . . .

All around him the Store began settling down for the night. The light and heating fixtures made soft pinging noises as they cooled, or creaked eerily just above the threshold of audibility. The woodwork ticked and sighed and the floor, relieved of the day-long pressure of thousands of pairs of feet, stretched minutely and moved itself into a more comfortable position. The sounds it made varied from those of a herd of running mice to the noise of distant gunfire. Later the Store would come to rest, but during his first few patrols the sound effects could be quite startling.

Some people would have been bothered by these sounds. They would have let their imaginations loose among the eerie creakings and tinklings and scufflings and peopled the darkness with formless horrors. Not that Tully didn't have a good imagination. To the contrary, but he prided himself in that his imagination was properly under control. He had no time for gothic horrors or brooding menaces or fantasy of any kind. Tully liked his science fiction straight.

So he patrolled up and down behind the shadowy counters, ignoring the noises off and with most of his attention concentrated in his nose, thinking the sort of thoughts he always thought around this time of night. He thought about his job, which was easy and, because few people would work the hours he worked, very well paid. Then he would think about the day job at the counter which was not so well paid and which he had held for so many years without getting any farther up the ladder. He had been good at his job, but then so had about two thousand others in the store, and he must have lacked that extra bit of push which would have led to promotion. Finally he would think about himself.

He was an intelligent, well-read—he by no means restricted himself to science fiction although he preferred it—and essentially lazy person. His few close friends credited him with high intelligence by

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inference and did not, because they were his friends, mention laziness at all. But others came straight out and asked him if he was so intelligent why didn't he have a better job? Tully had asked himself the same question often without finding a satisfactory answer. Apparently there *were* no jobs which demanded a calm, easy-going disposition allied with detailed, but not specialist, knowledge on such widely-varied subjects as Stellar Evolution, the history of the Roman Empire, the latest work being done on the psychology of worms and similar unrelated items. At the moment his job gave him plenty of time to read and think, and gave him security while he was doing these things, so he had no real cause for complaint. Tully now knew that he had not been happy in his job at the counter. The pay had been lower even though the chance of promotion had been much higher. But basically all he had had was a chance, and Tully's reading had included data on the Laws of Chance, so after due consideration he had gone after the job which was a fairly well paid dead end—he had chosen Security.

Pun unintentional, he thought wryly.

His watch said eight-thirty and he was just finishing the Third floor, walking from the brightly-lit well towards the staff stairway. Around the well everything stood out bright and sharp and clear, but as he moved away from it objects began to throw long shadows, which eventually grew so hazy that the objects themselves became shadows. The vast, unlighted portion of the shop seemed to have become unreal, as if God had switched it off because nobody was using it. This was a very fanciful line of thought for Tully, but he sometimes indulged in such thinking when he wanted to mentally change the subject.

He did not like to think that he was a highly intelligent, well-read failure . . .

On the way to the Fourth floor he checked his thread and found it unbroken. The sight of the thin black thread turned dusty white by the narrow beam of his torch sent the odd business of the dolls rushing back into his mind, and immediately his dark mood lifted. He had been given a problem which he did not think any ordinary night-watchman could solve. Mr. Steele had suggested as much, although there was the possibility that the Store Manager had simply been making a crack about his taste in literature. This doll business was a challenge and Tully felt that if he met it successfully he might be able to stop thinking of himself as a complete failure.

Tully spent longer than usual on the Fourth, particularly in Mr. Steele's office. His reason for that

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was that he wanted to have a closer look at the mutilated doll. He found it in Mr. Steele's wastebasket, rescued it and placed it on Mr. Steele's blotter. Then he switched on Mr. Steele's desk-lamp and with a slight qualm of something he couldn't put a name to he sat down in Mr. Steele's chair.

His second examination of the doll told him nothing new, at first. It was still just a one-eyed, one-legged armless black doll with a lot of its hair missing. But then he noticed that the hair might have been pulled out accidentally, that it had not simple been yanked out but rather that somebody had been trying to twist it into all-over pig-tails. Tully grunted; it seemed a useless bit of information. Almost automatically he lifted the doll and smelt its hair.

And got a faint, almost indetectable odour of something which could have been peppermint.

Suddenly impatient with himself Tully threw the doll back into the wastebasket. He was imagining things, either that or his nose was suffering from persistence of smell. It was stupid to suppose that his dolls and Tyson's missing lawnmower had any connection . . .

On the fifth floor, which housed the store's administrative offices, and on the roof above it there were no smouldering cigarette ends or signs of anyone skulking in the elevator housings. By the time he had finished the roof check it was nine-twenty, so he hurried down to the Time Office to make coffee for his first supper and watch the overtime men clocking out.

Ten minutes later he was standing at the only unlocked exit from the store, with the floor supervisor in charge of Lock-up and Overtime, watching the late workers troop out. Tully did not know what exactly he was looking for, but he did know that nobody left the place chewing peppermints or with a lawn-mower under their coat. He chatted for a few minutes with the supervisor, offered him a cup of coffee which was accepted, then let him out.

By nine-forty-five Tully was alone inside a tightly sealed department store.

After his coffee and sandwiches he did his second round, then set up a folding chair in the Book department. He sat down, drew the magazine which had arrived that morning out of his pocket and prepared to face the night. He was supposed to make his rounds at random intervals, the theory being that nobody would know where he was going to be at any given time. It being next to impossible to devise completely random intervals, Tully mixed business with pleasure by reading his magazine for the night and patrolling between stories. Sometimes he read the

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short stories first, sometimes last, just to make it more difficult for any hypothetical observer who might be trying to beat his system . . .

He began his third round at eleven-fifty-eight, thinking that there were some people who could handle psi—Bester, Sturgeon and a few others—and some who most definitely could not. When they tried their stories read like fantasy; instead of natural laws and controlled experiments there was chaos and a sort of aseptic witchcraft. Still seething quietly, Tully finished his round and read another story. He had his second supper, it being close to one-thirty, then made his fourth patrol.

All the threads were intact, he saw nothing unusual, not a thing was stirring, not even a . . . But then, he reminded himself, the Store did not have mice.

It was during his third story that Tully heard something—something unusual, that was. The floors and lighting fixtures still ticked and creaked at intervals, but this sounded exactly like a bolt being drawn. As he strained his ears to listen it was followed by the sounds of a door being opened and closed quietly and a muffled, slapping sound. It seemed to be coming from the Dugout entrance.

Tully put down his magazine, sheer habit making him mark his place with a used bus ticket, and moved from behind the counter. He glanced quickly at the department telephone, which at night was connected to an outside line in case he suddenly needed to call the Police or the Fire Department, then shook his head—he didn't need help, at least, not yet. With his torch in one hand and his shoes in the other he sprinted silently towards the Dugout entrance, pausing only long enough to check that the Toy door was still bolted and its thread unbroken.

The other door had been opened and the thread pulled from its anchoring gum. For a moment Tully dithered between entering the Dugout and checking where the person who had entered it had come from, then he made up his mind and ran up the stairs.

The threads were dislodged from the first to the fourth floors, but not the fifth. Whoever it was must have been hiding on the fourth floor, although Tully didn't see how anyone could have remained hidden after the going over he had given the place. On the way downstairs again his light picked out a small, damp patch on one of the stairs, as if someone had spat and scuffed over it with their shoe. He paused, sniffing. There was a distinct smell of peppermint.

So Steele had been wrong, Tully thought wildly; the dolls and Tyson's missing lawn-mower and now even the spitting on the

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staff stairway were all part of the same problem. He hurried down the stairs with the pieces of what he thought had been three separate puzzles whirling around in his mind, trying to form a picture of the person who was responsible for the disappearance of various tools and one large, motorised lawn-mower, who mutilated black dolls, who was fond of eating peppermints and who spat.

It was as well that in a few minutes he would be meeting this person face to face, Tully thought grimly; otherwise he thought that he would have died out of sheer curiosity . . .

Still in his stockinged feet, Tully opened the Dugout door. Fanning the beam of his torch he painted the room with fast zigzags of light. It was empty. But there was a narrow, vertical band of light coming from the corridor leading to the Toys. It took him a couple of seconds to realise that someone had partly closed the door half-way along the connecting corridor, the door which had been dogged open for so long that Tully had almost forgotten it had hinges. He moved forward carefully, keeping the door between the source of light and himself, until he was just behind it. Then he looked into the Toy department.

There were enough lights switched on to show him the scene in detail. The mouth of the corridor framed the corner of a counter, a large square of floor, and something on the floor that was five feet long and black and slug-like. The slug-like something was curled around a large black doll, pulling one of its arms off . . .

Tully staggered back against the wall, instinctively seeking a prop for his shaking body while he tried to steady his whirling mind.

The wall wasn't there.

Tully opened his mouth to scream, and grunted instead as his shoulder hit a hard, sloping surface and he began to roll. The roll lasted only for a few yards before he crashed into an irregular metal object which knocked the breath out of him. His shoes and torch thudded gently against his body, and when he could breathe again he groped for the flash and switched it on.

He was lying close to the bottom of a hollow sphere twenty-five feet in diameter which had been cut out of the Store's foundation material. He could see where the concrete, masonry and even the steel reinforcing had been sheered off along a perfect, spherical plane, and where the loose earth and clay was kept from falling into it by a thin film of hard, transparent material. The only break in the sphere was the opening which Tully had fallen through.

A smaller spherical object rested at the bottom of the hollow,

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surrounded thickly by metal objects some of which he recognised as having once been powered hand-tools. There was also a six-foot circle of brickwork which was obviously the plug for the entrance, and the motorised lawn-mower which he had collided with on the way in. All the tools had been . . . changed . . . in ways that would have given their designers nightmares, and what had been done to the lawn-mower verged on the obscene. The smell of peppermint was overpowering. Tully climbed to his feet and, carefully, began to explore.

The beam of his flash bobbed and vibrated along the hull of the small, spherical ship with its not quite transparent shell and alien internal plumbing. It jerked because his hands were shaking, because his whole body was shaking. He had the shakes because part of him was afraid, the part which was thinking like a store night-watchman, but mostly he was shaking with sheer excitement as his mind stretched and his imagination soared to accept the reality of what was before him.

An alien ship, probably force-landed and needing repairs, skilfully concealed while the repairs were being carried out. The evidence lay all around him—tools, human tools, modified and used to make other tools which made other tools which might be capable of making the repairs. It was a unique situation, probably the first time such a thing had happened on Earth, but at the same time it was one that was very familiar to Tully.

Many times he had discussed just this situation with those few friends who shared his taste in literature. What would you do, the question usually went, if an alien spaceship landed in your back yard? Would you try to talk, would you run, or would you call out the militia? The answer which Tully and his friends preferred had invariably been the first one—you would try to talk, try to work out a method of communication. Then if the visitor needed help, or was trying to help you, you would be able to discover which. Of course, there might be a third alternative—it might be hostile, completely inimical . . .

Neither Tully nor his friends liked that third alternative. For one thing they had come up against that situation far to often in stories and they thought it corny. Another reason, a much more subtle and complex one, was their feeling that the Universe was such a big place that it was ridiculous to think of anyone coveting one tiny mote in it to such an extent that they would contemplate war to get it, together with a strong, philosophically based belief that anyone who was advanced enough to cross intersteller space must be highly civilised as

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well. If there was any hostility, any *apparent* hostility, it would come about through misunderstanding.

Tully would have to see to it that he managed his First Contact without misunderstandings . . .

He shivered again with sheer excitement and swept his torch around the hideout which the alien had built in the middle of the Store's foundations. It had been using and modifying Earth-type tools for its repairs, that seemed obvious. But there were other questions to which Tully itched to have the answers. How had the alien been able to materialise inside the solid foundations and create this place? And how was it able to pick out a place where tools were readily available? Had it detected them, or did it already know they were there? Had the ship been travelling, not through interstellar space but through Time . . .? The answers, he knew, could come only from the alien.

Abruptly Tully came to a decision. He tied his shoes together by their laces, hung them around his neck and with the torch sticking out of his mouth like a metal trunk, scrambled up to the opening. At the lip of the hole he paused, sniffed, then hurried quietly along the corridor and out into the Store. He replaced the thread across the door so that he would know if the alien left the basement while he was making his preparations.

Much of the equipment he needed was already in the basement in the shape of children's blackboards and chalks. And a measure of contact had already been made in that he knew what the alien looked like and, by virtue of its detection gear, the alien was used to the sight of Tully's species. At the same time he would have to render his general aspect less frightening to the alien. One, the most important, method would be not to carry a weapon or anything which might be mistaken for such. Then there was another, more positive method . . .

Grinning suddenly, Tully headed for the confectionery counter. There he uncapped the big glass jar that was labelled "Extra Strong Peppermints" and began stuffing his mouth and pockets with the hard, white sweets. The way Tully saw it the alien's body odour smelled of peppermint, or of something very like peppermint. The smell was not unpleasant to Tully, but the human body smell might be quite distressing to the alien, and if he tried to conceal it with the nearest equivalent he could manage to the alien's own smell, that should further reassure it of his friendly intentions.

Completely disregarding the bad effects to his teeth, Tully began to crunch and chew. Within

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minutes his tongue, mouth and throat were practically paralysed by the hot-cold burn of the peppermints and his breath was stinking up the whole department. Tully popped in a few replacements and hurried back to the Dugout.

He paused on the way to look again at the phone in the Book department, wondering if he should call somebody. Not the Police or the Fire Department. Definitely not Mr. Steele, at least, not yet. One of his friends maybe, except that even then what he had to say might not sound believable at three o'clock in the morning. He wasn't frightened, Tully told himself; just excited and a little worried. He couldn't help thinking of all those arm-less dolls and wondering how they fitted into the alien's purpose.

The theory of a sex-maniac wandering the Toy department had been demolished. Tully now knew what exactly it was that wandered the Toy department at night, but what bothered him was its behavior towards the dolls. Had it, in some obscure fashion, been trying to communicate with *him* . . . ?

Tully went into the Dugout quietly, closing and locking the door behind him, and along the corridor. At the partly open dividing door he put his torch on the floor and continued towards the Toy department whistling and putting his feet down firmly so as to give the alien warning of his coming. But just before he entered the basement he stopped whistling when it occurred to him that high-pitched sounds might not be pleasant to alien ears—the noise he was making was not even pleasant to his own ears, Tully had to admit. Then suddenly he was in the Toy department and the alien was on the floor less than five yards away.

It was long and black and slug-like, with a soft bulginess about its body which suggested that internally it must be nearly all liquid. It moved by altering its centre of gravity rapidly back and forwards, in a series of tumbling lurches accompanied by a wet slapping sound. The head section—Tully guessed it was the head by its direction of motion—had a grey, shining bulge which might have been a single eye over a long, cone-like proboscis, and five, long, thin tentacles sweeping forward. Its direction of motion was away from Tully and it was moving fast. Obviously it was afraid of him.

Tully stuffed more peppermints into his mouth and followed it, but slowly so as not to frighten it further. So far as he could see it wasn't wearing or carrying anything so that he was in no danger from extra-terrestrial weapons. He showed his empty hands continually and made reassuring noises, and tried to attract its at-

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tention by drawing non-scale diagrams of the Solar System and Pythagorus' Thereom on one of the children's blackboards. But it was no good, it kept running away from him and trying to get back into the corridor where its ship was.

Tully could not allow that, at least, not yet. While the e-t was still excited and afraid of him he didn't want it getting its hands on a weapon.

He was standing in the mouth of the corridor trying to think of some other approach when he heard a noise which caused the cold sweat to pop on his forehead.

He had been blind, stupid—Tully could see that now. He had made a gross tactical blunder. The broken threads between the dugout and Hardware department indicated the passage of someone between the fourth floor and the basement, but they could just as well have shown movement in the opposite direction. There were *two* aliens and the other one was coming back. Tully could hear it working at the locked Dugout door . . .

His first thought was that he had to keep the two aliens apart, until he could make the one he was chasing understand that he meant no harm. If the second alien came on the scene it might misunderstand and Tully would not be able to stop it going to its ship for a weapon—always supposing it wasn't already carrying one. He must close the door in the corridor. He had already taken a step in that direction when he remembered that it was a simple bolt fastening, and locks and bolts did not a prison make for these aliens—he remembered the way his keys had stuck to the Dugout lock. The aliens could open locks magnetically. He would have to wedge it shut.

A set of kiddies building blocks gave him what he wanted and he ran back to the dividing door. By that time the second alien was on the way down the ramp and Tully used his torch briefly to have a look at it.

It was bigger, thicker and somehow meaner looking than the one behind him. *The male of the species*, he thought. When it saw him it began to hurry, humping and lurching down the corridor and making high-pitched gobbling sounds. Behind him the other one began gobbling, too. Tully slammed the door and began kicking in the wedges just as a large, soft heavy weight made its hinges creak.

A few seconds later one of the wedges was pushed from under the door . . .

Tully had just decided that he had made another blunder. That the second alien, with the devices in its ship available, could probably blast through the door in nothing flat, and probably blast

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through Tully as well. But now it seemed that it was not going to be as quick and dramatic as that. The second alien did not want to destroy the door because that would leave unmistakable evidence of its presence in the Store, but no doubt Tully could be made to disappear tracelessly. He kicked the wedge in again, just as the one beside it popped out.

The smaller alien behind him had amused itself by pulling the arms off dolls. The second one . . . Tully wondered sickly what it would feel like to have his arms and leg pulled off, his nose mutilated and his eye . . . He tried desperately not to think about it, tried to think about good, civilised aliens, but his mind kept turning back to the other sort. The sort that Lovecraft used to write about.

According to Lovecraft the whole of Time and Space was peopled with cruel, debased, unspeakably foul entities, beings as cold and malignant and uncaring as the interstellar wastes in which they dwelt. Humanity with its concern over Right and Wrong inhabited a single dust-mote, unknown and unknowing, in a continuum that was one vast, blasphemous obscenity. Tully had not liked Lovecraft's ideas, but they had been written up so well that they had stuck in his mind despite this. And Lovecraft's aliens were the type who *would* pull another living, intelligent creature apart with less feeling than an unthinking boy would pull the legs off a fly . . .

Two more wedges jerked from under the door, and Tully couldn't move to replace them. All he could do was shake. His mind seemed to be a tight, hard ball of panic. He was beginning to realise that it was an *alien* at the other side of the door, a being whose civilisation and philosophy and thought processes were such that there might be no common ground between them. And even if understanding was possible, he had spoiled any chance he had ever had of gaining it by closing the door.

Judging by its reactions his attempt to contact the first alien had simply driven it into a panic, and then when the second one had come rushing to its aid he had barred the way. So far as the e.t. outside was concerned he might be doing anything to its mate, and the longer he kept them apart the less likely the larger alien would be to stop and think. And he couldn't run himself because the Toy door was bolted on the outside.

It occurred to him suddenly that he had met this situation before also—the bug-eyed monster, the girl and the hero dashing to the rescue. Only this time *he* was the bug-eyed monster . . .!

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Somehow that thought brought him out of his panic state. Basically his problem was to show that he was a kindly disposed bug-eyed monster and not the other sort, and to show it unmistakably and fast. Tully was getting the glimmering of an idea, based on an assumption that might be all wrong, but he needed time to try it out. At least ten minutes. Abruptly he started kicking in the wedges again, kicking them in so hard and far that he ruined the toe-caps of his shoes and nearly broke a couple of toes. Then he sprinted back to the Toy basement and started tearing open a box of modelling clay.

Pulling and kneading at the stuff, Tully tried to work it into a shape that was shapeless. The clay was an improbable green colour, but this did not worry him because the modelling set included a sprayer which, as well as giving the finished model a thin, hard skin within seconds, allowed it to be painted any desired colour. While he worked Tully tried not to think of the gamble he was taking, or the scraping as wedge after wedge was pushed away, or of the gobbling which came from the other side of the door.

His theory, he told himself desperately, was supported by all the facts. It explained why one alien was careful to hide all traces of itself and its work, by plugging its bolt-hole and probably doing some sort of self-welding job on the metal strapping around the packing cases it had pilfered, while the other one left mutilated dolls lying around . . .

He finished it just as the last wedge shot out and the door banged against the wall. Tully tried to ignore the heavy, slapping sounds of the second alien coming along the corridor and moved instead towards the other alien—slowly, so as to frighten it as little as possible. It was in a corner, still making agitated gobbling noises. It occurred to Tully that his height might frighten it so he got onto his knees, then flat on his stomach, and crawled towards it holding out the thing he had made in one hand. Behind him the slapping grew louder and the smell of something that wasn't peppermint grew stronger.

He was gambling everything on his theory being right; lying flat on his stomach, defenseless, not even looking at his potential attacker. And his main reason for taking such a suicidal risk, Tully thought wildly, was that he did not want to think of the Galaxy being peopled with Lovecraft aliens . . .

He was only a few feet away from the smaller alien when the big one lurched to a halt beside Tully. It didn't look at him, but shot its five, whip-like tentacles out at the other e-t. Five smaller tentacles came out to meet them,

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touched, and almost tied themselves in five separate knots. Tully held his breath, afraid even to hope. It was not until the smaller e-t had left for the ship carrying the doll which Tully had made for it, and its parent began drawing a solar system with seventeen planets in it on the blackboard, that Tully knew he had guessed right.

Later that morning, as he tidied up the corridor and Toy department after the aliens had gone underground for the day, Tully thought that it had been obvious from the very start that a child had been responsible for the doll business. While its parent had been up in Hardware searching for the proper tools, Junior had grown bored. It had wanted to play with a dolly, but all the dollies in the Toy department were the wrong shape. So it had chosen one that was the nearest in colour and pulled off the arms and a leg to give it a more 'human' shape. Twisting out its nose and hair to resemble the five tentacles and cone-like proboscis and removing the surplus eye had been further attempts towards that end. Looked at objectively, the mutilated dolls did look a little like the aliens. But not much, because the small alien had never thought enough of them to bring them back into the ship.

It had kept, and had seemed delighted with, the doll which Tully had made for it. Which meant that the Toy department reign of terror was over. As for the spitting on the staircase, well, the aliens were not built for climbing stairs and they sometimes lost small amounts of body fluid when forced to do so. That, too, would stop in a few days time when the repairs to the ship were complete. And the tools borrowed from Hardware would be returned to their former shape and replaced. No doubt this would cause widespread consternation, Tully thought wryly, but Tyson could not very well *complain*. All in all everybody should be happy.

Tully yawned and looked at his watch. It was six-thirty. He had just time to remove all his thread and chewing gum from the doors and stairway, make some coffee and finish the last story in his magazine before he unlocked the staff entrance for the Cleaners arriving at seven-thirty. It had looked like being a very good story, he thought as he walked slowly up the Dugout ramp, which had been his reason for saving it until last.

He hoped it wouldn't be an anti-climax.

In our May issue ► ► ► ► ► ► ► ► ► ► ► ► **RAY BRADBURY**

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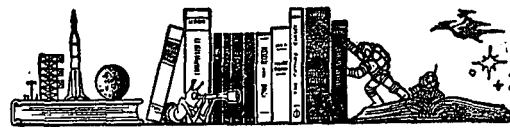
BOOKS



THE INHERITORS, William Golding, Harcourt, Brace & World, $4.50

FUZZ AGAINST JUNK, IS THAT YOU SIMON?, THE BOILER MAKER, THE HERO MAKER, Akbar Del Piombo, Citadel Press, $1.00

THE HUGO WINNERS, Isaac Asimov, ed., Doubleday & Co., $4.50

THE MOUSE ON THE MOON, Leonard Wibberley, William Morrow, $3.95

THEY WALKED LIKE MEN, Clifford D. Simak, Doubleday & Co., $3.95

THE REVOLT OF THE ANGELS, Anatole France, Crown Publishers, $1.45

THE INHERITORS is by that William Golding whose LORD OF THE FLIES was such a critical success a few years ago—and still is, for that matter. I didn't care for it, didn't finish; all I can say is that it was probably no worse than FRANNY AND ZOOEY, *ikh* . . . On the other hand I was enchanted, delighted by the story of Mr. Golding's, I wish to Hell I could remember its *name,* included in the volume SOMETIME, NEVER; along with one by John Christopher and one by Mervyn Peake—do you remember? about an Alexandrian of the (I guess) mid-Roman Empire who prematurely invented steam engine, telegraph, and gunpowder? If you haven't got it, rush right out and buy it. However—

THE INHERITORS. Someone referred not so long ago to "writers of the Ogthe son of Ug school, if there are any still around." There still are, as witness *Life* Magazine's so-called History of Man—Science Fiction masquerading as Science. The blurb writer for Mr. Golding's new book does not employ either term, but mention there of "our sense of wonder" indicates a certain familiarity with this *genre* and its terminology. The book opens with the spring migration of a band of eight pre-historic men—Lok and Ha are adult males, Fa and Nil are adult females. Mal is the old man of the bunch. The old woman is unnamed. Liku is the small daughter of Lok and Fa; the infant boy of Ha and Nil is called simply "the

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new one." They are moving from the sea to the hills, near the ice. It is a hard life, and they cherish the old man's story of "the time when there had been many people . . . when it was summer all the year round and the flowers and fruit hung on the same branch." But now there are only these eight, worshipping a sort of female principle-earth mother called Oa, feeling it is a sin to take the life of even an animal (but eating meat if an animal is already dead), laughing often, and employing a sort of telepathy which they call "sharing pictures."

Thus does Mr. Golding idealize the life of the last of the Neanderthal people, depicting them as a sort of noble savage, and contrasting them—vividly, and with a very successfully conveyed horror—with "the new men", i.e. the Cro-Magnon people: homo sapiens, so-called; with whom they come into sudden and dreadful contact. "Oa never brought them out of her belly," says Fa. Lok doesn't understand, he only wants to make friends.

I discussed the book with an anthropologist who said that he was afraid that "the Neanderthal man was probably just a smelly old savage just like any other smelly old savage." He wouldn't buy the telepathy bit. My wife objected that, since the more primitive a people the more complex their language, H. Neanderthalensis was more likely to be named something like Vercingetorix than Ha, or Girlwhowasbornwhenthefullmoonwasyellow than Fa. No one, of course, can say if the Mousterians were really hairy, with manes, chestnut-colored; or had freckles—and then, too, no one can say if they were otherwise. A recent diagnosis based on the most complete Mousterian or Neanderthal skeleton (in France), on which much of our opinion of what these (supposedly) *uhr*-cousins of ours were like, physically, suggests strongly that this antique Frenchman was badly crippled by arthritis. Future pictures may show M. Neanderthal standing a lot straighter.

It is equally impossible to say how far analogies with modern "primitives" (a term which makes anthropologists shudder) can be drawn to account for the behavior or beliefs of ancient ones. Wrong guesses have been made about what the Bushmen, for example, do or think, have been corrected. In the case of the Neanderthalers, theirs is at best an uncertain trumpet, and moreover it is choked with dust, forever.

All this, however, belongs to Science. Mr. Golding's book is Science *Fiction*—Speculative Fiction, to use Miss Judith Merril's phrase—and it is damned good fiction, too, call it what you will. Lok and Ha may have been nature's gentlemen; then, again, they

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may have noshed on their dead uncles. Your guess is as good as mine or Mr. G.'s. I am content to leave a scientific appraisal of the book to our Dr. Asimov; from a literary point of view this book is a good book. Everyone of these eight poor doomed boogeymen, whether they were vegetarians or not, is a *character,* not a mere clicker-and-grunter; a personality. The events move, they move well, they move fast, and they may even move you to a couple of tears. Sometimes, it is true, William Golding tries so hard to make us see the events through the deep-set eyes of his Neanderthals that I, for one, a non-Neanderthal, am sometimes at a loss to know what is going on. But then that's true of things happening right here in the current century of Christian love, too.

FUZZ AGAINST JUNK, IS THAT YOU SIMON?, THE BOILER MAKER, THE HERO MAKER. These four incredible gouaches (to borrow a phrase from The Kindly Editor) by "Akbar Del Piombo", can hardly be believed even when they are seen. Rightly be they called FAR-OUT books—you can't hardly *get* no more far out than these are. The last three are also credited to Norman Rubington for "Collages"; the first one uses only "whole" illustrations. For all four little volumes, however, the source of the illustrations is the same—the last quarter of the 19th Century, by my guess; and my further guess is that most of them are steel engravings, with perhaps some lithographs and a few half-tone reproductions of photographs. They seem to have been culled from every conceivable source, and some which are quite inconceivable—war scenes, medical and dental texts, newspapers, novels, dime novels, travel books, guide-books, side-show advertisements, steam-bath ditto, old catalogs, scientific and gymnastic and architectural works, godhelpusandwhathaveyou.

The practice of taking illustrations and tacking onto them captions which originally had nothing to do with them is no longer new, but I do not recall that entire books have been produced this way before—and certainly nothing like *these* have ever been produced before. The text of FUZZ AGAINST JUNK is straight out of hyperbeatdom, and goes so far in mocking at anti-narcotic activity (admittedly over-ripe for overhaul) that it stops just short of saying, "Heroin is *good* for you." IS THAT YOU SIMON? (no comma) is a spoof on the Race For Space; THE BOILER MAKER pokes fun at art collecting, movie making, and factionalism among the avante-garde. As for THE HERO MAKER, well, it beats the Hell out of *me*. A large part of the total effect of the four books comes from the incongruity

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of the modern text with the antique pictures, but so many of the pictures were so hoo-boy to begin with that one can only Wonder.

At any rate, leave me not try and read Deep Significance into any of it, but *you must see them!* "Akbar Del Piombo", indeed! Hoo-hah.

No credits are listed for the anonymous jacket-designer of THE HUGO WINNERS, which is too bad, for I think the fellow ought to be stripped of his pen and drummed from the corps for misfeasance, malfeasance, and nonfeasance of office. This cover is a glaring black and white thing, with nothing but type and a tiny photograph of the "Hugo" Award, repeated nine times—there having been nine winners of this award in the Short Fiction category. The effect reminds me inescapably of those sad volumes which are invariably privately printed, often in places like Witchita (Kansas), frequently authored by women of a certain age, generally the widows of wholesale linoleum dealers, and commonly on religio-social themes (expositions of the Apocalypse of Daniel, copious footnote-references to II Corinthians 13: 21-26, etc., showing the approaching End of the WORLD, not unrelated to the iniquitous Federal taxes on linoleum).

Having shot my splenetic bolt, let me go on and say that the book is otherwise a rich and satisfactory volume—a judgement in which I am undeterred by false modesty, being one of the contributors. Herewith its contents, as arranged by Editor Asimov.

1955: 13th [WORLD SCIENCE FICTION] CONVENTION, CLEVELAND. 1—THE DWARFSTELLER by Walter M. Miller, Jr. (*novelette*). 2—ALLAMAGOOSA by Eric Frank Russell (*short story*). 1956: 14th CONVENTION, NEW YORK. 3—EXPLORATION TEAM by Murray Leinster (*novelette*). 4—THE STAR by Arthur C. Clarke (*short story*). 1958: 16TH CONVENTION, LOS ANGELES. 5—OR ALL THE SEAS WITH OYSTERS by Avram Davidson (*short story*). 1959: 17TH CONVENTION, Detroit. 6—THE BIG FRONT YARD by Clifford D. Simak (*novelette*). 7—THE HELL-BOUND TRAIN by Robert Bloch (*short story*). 1960: 18TH CONVENTION, PITTSBURGH. 8—FLOWERS FOR ALGERNON by Daniel Keyes (*novelette*). 1961: 19TH CONVENTION, SEATTLE. 9—THE LONGEST VOYAGE by Poul Anderson (*novelette*). Not the least pleasant part of the book is Dr. Asimov's introduction and his word-sketches of the Award-winning authors, all in his most delightfully humorous vein—a vein barely hinted at in his own stories and science-fact writings, but well familiar to those who have met or

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corresponded with him—although I must say that his reference to me as "mostly Beard" verges on the libelous. There is also given a brief history of the "Hugo", named after Hugo Gernsback, Founding Father, and originated by SF fan Hal Vincent Lynch; plus a list of those who have won the award in the other categories besides Short Fiction. The stories included here thus owe their inclusion not to the arbitrary preference of any one anthologist but to their having been voted on and selected by all those Science Fiction readers whose interest in the field was sufficient for them to participate in the annual selection. I really do not see how the volume can be omitted from any collection, and, after all, you can always throw away the (ugh) jacket.

Mr. Leonard Wibberley's latest, THE MOUSE ON THE MOON, is like Mr. Leonard Wibberley's earliest, THE MOUSE THAT ROARED—a mildly pleasant little fantasy with the consistency and flavor of a thin, sweet chocolate drink. Once again the tiny Duchy of Grand Fenwick becomes involved in international politics and high science; once again it comes out triumphant whilst the great powers shout and bumble about. In this one Count Mountjoy, Fenwick's Prime Minister, solely to effect some local purpose not covered by the Ducal budget, applies to the United States for a loan of $50,000,000, ostensibly to send a manned rocket to the Moon. What happens next would not strain the predictive powers of a five-year old elf. Those who want to *read* what happens next will have to go find out somewhere else. *Peek*-a-boo!

There are times when people hunting living-space in these United States might feel justified in believing the background of Clifford Simak's latest novel, THEY WALKED LIKE MEN—a rather lousy title, let me say. Suddenly—his characters find—nothing is available for rent or purchase anymore: literally nothing. Everything is being bought up: literally everything. By whom?—and for what purpose? is the burden of the book. Its basic premise is utterly absurd, the denouement, though mildly funny, is preposterous; it is a tribute to Mr. Simak's craftsmanship, which I admire, that my flesh crawled and my hair stood up a couple of times anyway. It is unfortunate that Mr. Simak's craftsmanship was not exercised in developing a better idea—or even a good idea, because he is a very nice fellow and the book's cover is really outstanding. It was designed by Lawrence Ratzin.

It was Anatole France who more or less perfected what might be called "the infidel novel." He did

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nothing so unsubtle as to deny any truth to theological teachings: he pretended to assume that they were in large measure true, and then let the fun begin. THE REVOLT OF THE ANGELS (translation by Mrs. Wilfrid Jackson) is about one Abdiel, a Heavenly being assigned as guardian angel to a young Frenchman named Maurice, to watch over his innocence and to guard his chastity. Abdiel does no great job of either, Maurice having lost both at the ripe age of fourteen. The real trouble, however, begins when Abdiel, largely as a result of having read too much theology in Maurice's family library and perhaps not having much digested it, comes to the conclusion that the Ruler of this World is not really its Creator after all; but merely Ialdabaoth, the Demiurge, or inferior deity, of whom the ancient Gnostics taught. Agitated and inspired by this, Abdiel takes on the form of a young man, changes his name to Arcade, and decides to begin organizing a second revolt of the angels (the first, in Christian theology, having resulted in Lucifer being cast down to Hell).

"Through streets filled with brown fog, pierced with white and yellow lights, where horses exhaled their smoking breath and motors radiated their rapid search-lights, the angel made his way, and, mingling with the black flood of foot-passengers which rolled unceasingly along, proceeded across the town from north to south till he came to the lonely boulevards on the left bank of the river." There, in a cheap restaurant favored by revolutionaries of all sorts, he meets Mirar, who is now called Théophile, and now a musician; to him Arcade declares his intent. But Théophile says no.

"I take no hand in politics," he says. "I still adore the Master I no longer serve, and I lament the days when shrouding myself with my wings I formed with the multitude of the children of light a wheel of flame around his throne of glory. Love, profane love has alone separated me from God. I quitted Heaven to follow a daughter of men. She was beautiful and sang in music-halls."

Certainly, the book is blasphemous. Blasphemy is no novelty in modern books; indeed, it involves no risks as long as the writer designates the object of his attack as "the God of the Old Testament." But THE REVOLT OF THE ANGELS is not merely amusing; it is literature. The other books are generally not even amusing.

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Ghost stories are usually associated with country houses of considerable antiquity, with the deceased being of high social rank as a general rule—although Mr. Henry James's hant in The Turn of the Screw *(we never cared for it) was a butler. Given the premise, however, that there be ghosts, there is no reason why they may not be found in every country, period, and level of society. It is very often that the* revenant *is connected, too, with some act of crime; and our large cities need yield to no place in this respect. Robert Wallsten paints for us so convincing a picture of criminality and parasitism that it is no surprise to learn that he was lately awarded a scroll by the Mystery Writers of America for a short story which appeared in* Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. *The writer of forty-three television dramas, six plays, and numerous short stories in popular magazines, Mr. Wallsten is also a former Broadway actor and World War Two naval officer . . . Those familiar with the VIIIth Plate of Hogarth's* The Rake's Progress *will know what awaits The Punk after this story closes; and may even find it possible to pity him—a little.*

PUNK'S PROGRESS

by Robert Wallsten

HE NEVER PASSED A MIRROR, or a store window that could serve as one, without a grave, side-long look into it. Usually, then, he gentled into place the green-gold wave at his temple with the palm of his hand, or yanked the big knot of his tie so that it sat at an angle from his collar, or hitched his trousers over his compact hips. And then his mouth set into not quite a smile of self-satisfaction —just enough for the dimple to flicker on his cheek—and he passed on.

He called himself Billy Lane. He loved clothes. He was a careful, flashy and informal dresser.

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His shoes were light in color, brightly polished, and elaborately perforated. He wore gabardine slacks in pastel shades, trick, vivid shirts that buttoned on the bias, with contrasting thread basted along the hems, belted jackets, sharp, pictorial ties, glittering hardware. He was especially proud of his hardware—of the big ring, and the tie clasp that looked like a dagger, and the collar fastener with fake rubies at the ends, and the large, initialled belt buckle, and the chain that looped in an opulent parabola from his belt to the room-key and the rabbit's foot in his trouser pocket.

Superstition was his only form of imagination. It was, in fact, his Achilles' heel. He was downright childish about it, and defensive too, and he snarled when criticized. Franny, for instance, had once laughed at him for it.

"No kidding, you belong down on the island of Haiti with all those voodoos and things!" she had said.

Billy Lane had answered, "Yeah? Well, that's the way I like it, see? So leave me alone."

And she, who was wise except in loving him, shrugged and left him alone.

His superstitions were standard, but many. He wouldn't light three on a match, he refused to walk under a ladder, he knocked on wood, he dreaded passing people on the stairs. Black cats, broken mirrors and the number thirteen made him queasy and uncomfortable. For some reason, nuns terrified him; he crossed the street to avoid them. Churches were only less forbidding than prisons. Both ambulances and hearses made him turn pale and look the other way.

His time of day was night, and his habitat was exclusively urban. The country was only an inconvenient stretch between cities, to be looked at dully through bus windows. In cities, he gravitated from one extreme to another: from the crowded and the brightly lighted to the almost deserted and the dark. From automats and beaneries and arcades and populous intersections where he lounged against cigar-store windows until the cops said "Move on," to the balconies of cheap movies, and side-street bars without television, to the ends of subway platforms and to parks, late at night, on bridges and along walks where the street-lamps had been extinguished with stones.

And at four in the morning, if he felt like it, he would call for Franny at O'Phelan's. But only if he felt like it, and Franny never knew whether he would or not. If something was cooking, he didn't show up. If there was even so little as a saw-buck in the offing, he stayed away. He never explained these absences. He told her he

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had been tied up. He said he couldn't make it. And Franny didn't ask questions. She knew she'd see him in a day or two; on Saturday, if not before. Whatever his fortunes during the week had been, she could be pretty sure of seeing him then. That was when his room rent was due.

Once, however, she had made a mistake. He hadn't been around for several days, and she missed him. It was a warm spring night, and she went to his rooming house and waited for him, sitting on the top step in the shadow of the brownstone bannister. Just before dawn, she heard him half a block away, whistling and snapping his fingers. When he arrived, and, boy-like, began to leap up the steps two at a time, she rose to greet him. He stopped in his tracks. He inhaled with an odd sound in his throat and stared up at her for a long motionless moment. Then he began to shout.

"Don't ever do that again! Do you hear me?"

"Shh," she said, "shh . . ."

"I don't want to be followed around, see? I don't want any goddamn woman nosing into my business!"

He went on like that for several minutes. She hadn't seen him so uncontrolled since the first night she had met him. She protested and tried to soothe him, but he wouldn't listen. Finally he said, "Now get out of here!" He shoved her down the steps, and stood there on the landing, angrily watching her till she had turned the corner.

The next time she saw him he didn't refer to the incident, and neither did she, but three nights later she learned the reason for it. He was lying in her arms and he said, "You scared the hell out of me the other night, baby doll."

He was chuckling, and she wasn't sure he was serious. "Scared you? You mean you thought I was a cop or something?"

"No—I knew it was you. I thought you was a—" He hesitated. "I don't know—a spirit or a—a ghost or something." He laughed again, reminiscently. "You gave me the willies, baby doll."

Franny patted his face and said "Oh", in that tone she had of filing something away for future reference.

On Franny's side, this arrangement with Billy Lane was more than slightly tinged with the romantic; on his, not at all. For her, he was—however faultily—the answer to a quest: she was lonely, and she craved someone to baby and take care of, to be affectionate to, and advise. For him, she was an economic and physical convenience, whose hours happened to coincide with his own.

She worked three or four of the

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bars along the avenue, but she always finished at O'Phelan's because that was where she kept her camera and her flash-bulbs under lock and key. It was her camera that had first introduced them.

He had been sitting in a booth with a blonde named Sheila, who, like many others who have never been inside a photographer's studio, called herself a model. She arranged her face in what she thought was a model's simper as Franny approached with her camera poised.

"Take your picture?" Franny asked, and smiled in the way she always did. Billy Lane said "No, thanks" and Sheila, at the same moment in an eager, affected, drawn-out voice, said "Yes!" Franny was a business woman. There was the click and the second's dazzling flash, and then she said, "Be ready in twenty minutes" and started off.

She had had no way of knowing that the photogenic young man with the night-time pallor and the dimple was excessively, morbidly, camera-shy. He rose and swore. It sounded like the spit of a cat. He slapped the camera out of her hand, and when it clattered to the floor, he ground it under his heel for good measure. He wanted no record of his face in anybody's possession.

"You son of a bitch," Franny said, before she started to cry; and Billy Lane took the blonde by the hand and swaggered out.

He was back an hour later, though, alone. He bought Franny a drink, and then another. He smiled contritely and he was very gentle and cute. He said, "Look, baby doll. I blew my top and I'm sorry." He said, "I'll get you the money for it, don't worry about that." He said, "What's your name, baby doll?"

He did better than get her the money. He got her another camera. He didn't say how, though she suspected, and didn't ask. He hung around till she had finished work, and took her home in a taxi.

See, Franny thought, he had his decent side. And when O'Phelan put his beer-damp hand on her shoulder and warned her against him, she said it aloud.

O'Phelan shook his head. "I've seen them come and I've seen them go, and let me tell you, that's bad news. You only have to look at him."

Franny shrugged. Then she looked up at O'Phelan, and smiled. She said, "Besides, I—I like him."

She had never understood why, with girls like Sheila available, Billy Lane had chosen her. She knew her looks were only average; she hoped she made the best of what she had. What she had were dark eyes that were large and could flash, a soft complexion,

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and a mouth too wide by far, though attractive when it smiled because her teeth were good. She also had a turbulent excess of black hair, a somewhat chunky figure, and legs that were much too heavy.

But she had personality, Billy told her, and that was why he loved her. He didn't love her; he had never in his life loved anyone, but he had found the word almost a guarantee of success with women, so he used it on Franny—it, and all the other words he knew she wanted to hear. At least, he did in the beginning. Later, he didn't bother.

Because the incentives to make Franny his girl had been far more practical. In the first place, she was alone, and Sheila, for instance, lived with her sister and brother-in-law. She worked steady, and Sheila didn't. She was generous, and Sheila wasn't. Sheila asked questions; Franny didn't. And he could go on. Sheila was cold, and Franny wasn't. No, *sir!* He whistled softly between his teeth, whenever he thought about how Franny wasn't cold. There was every reason, for the moment, to make her his girl.

He had only intended it to be for the moment. "I'm a rolling stone, see?" he said. "All of a sudden I'll move on—like that!" And he snapped his thumb and middle finger saying, "You get further by yourself." Franny nodded while he explained it, and finally she said, "Sure, honey. I get it." And that was the way it was.

That was the way it went on being. He kept reminding her of his imminent, unexpected departure, and she kept assuring him that she understood; and he stayed with her. For eight months he stayed with her. He stayed with her for a year.

And at the end of that time, he was still exactly the same and she had changed a lot. He was still casual and undemonstrative, except at moments in her room. He had even, in an offhand way, been unfaithful now and then, but sometimes he had had to be, for business reasons. And Franny was good people: she had never, up to now, asked questions.

As for the changes in herself, she wasn't aware of them; but the truth was she no longer regarded the arrangement as temporary. Billy Lane had become a habit. She depended on him. She needed him. It had never occurred to her to be unfaithful. "Why?" she would have asked. "What for?" She had thought him a petulant but beguiling child; now she knew he was also shrewd and evil. But that didn't matter. He was all she cared about, or ever would. She would fight to keep him. She would go on buying him for as long as he would let her. She would even try to buy him afterwards.

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She had fallen in love with him; and she had grown possessive; and that was one of the reasons why Billy Lane found it necessary to kill her.

The new girl's name was Nektar, and she was all the things that the forgotten Sheila had aspired and pretended to be. She was a real blonde, and an actual model. She worked at it and made quite a lot of money at it. She was thin and very tall—taller than Billy, which obscurely delighted him—and she had a flat, unchanging Oriental kind of face. She wasn't Oriental; she came from the South, and she had a slow, low, droning way of talking that made Billy whistle between his teeth. She lived uptown, not in just a room with a kitchenette and bath, but in an apartment. She went to nice places, only to nice places, and she knew how to dress. She represented a whole new world to Billy Lane. She had class.

Like other women, she thought him cute. He amused her and excited her in about equal measure. She guessed the viciousness behind the bland, cherubic face—not its exact nature, just its presence; but that, for her, was the spice. She knew many other men, some of them quite important, some who even talked marriage. But she encouraged Billy. Billy was for kicks.

At first she let him visit her only now and then; twice in one week was often. And this was a new experience for him, who was used to being the favorite, and to making choices and decisions for himself. She kept him in suspense; she challenged him, tantalized him, and subjected him completely.

Of course he continued with Franny. There were other nights in the week, after all, and Franny was like family now—no strain, as Billy put it. So she got Nektar's leavings, and he thought that was a break for her.

Franny never met Nektar, never even saw her. But she guessed pretty quickly that something was up—the real thing this time, more threatening than ever before. She recognized the symptoms: Billy had become abstracted, sullen, critical and quarrelsome. She knew that all the time he was comparing her to someone else. First she told herself that it would pass, as it always had. The thing was to ask no questions, not even to notice.

But it didn't pass. It got worse. It got much worse as Billy became more successful with Nektar. Franny heard herself saying all the things she knew she shouldn't say but couldn't keep from saying. Little verbal side-swipes. Little hintful jealous cracks. She looked at the match covers that Billy scattered around, because—though he

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told her nothing else—he couldn't resist letting her know the kind of places he was going to these days. "Well," she said, "we're getting up in the world, aren't we?"

"That's right," was all that Billy answered.

She even mentioned other men, to pique him. "Know who took me home last night? George. Said he was coming around tonight too."

But he didn't rise to it. "Yeah?" he said, walking around the room, snapping his fingers. He didn't seem to care.

And finally she did the unforgiveable thing: she asked him questions, direct ones. "Where were you last night?" "Who is she?" "Where did you meet her?" "What does she do?" Billy looked at her out of eyes that had suddenly gone opaque, and said, "Knock it off, baby doll. Shut up." Coldly. Threateningly.

Once, when he stayed away for ten whole days, Franny nearly went out of her mind. "It's all for the best," O'Phelan told her. "Forget him." She tried her best, but she couldn't. She took to drinking quite a lot, and to crying, with sudden, surprising savagery; deeply, rackingly, so that sometimes it sounded almost like laughter. She couldn't get to sleep nights unless she was pretty drunk. And even then she didn't stay asleep. She woke up with her head pounding, and smoked, wandering around the room or just lying in bed, staring into the wall that was alive with the moving lights of the traffic below.

Then he turned up again. He appeared at O'Phelan's late at night, and at once she was struck with the strangeness of his manner. His blue eyes glittered as they never had before. He had been to the sea-shore, he told her, and had the tan to prove it. But there was something else; something fevered and self-intoxicated about him; something brand new.

For half an hour, with O'Phelan silently approving and egging her on, she ignored him. She didn't speak to him. But when at four o'clock O'Phelan closed, Billy was waiting for her on the street outside, and fell into step with her as if nothing had happened at all.

"You couldn't have sent me a card or anything?" she said. "You couldn't let a girl know?" It wasn't, after all, very much she wanted.

Billy laughed her questions away. "I couldn't, baby doll. I couldn't make it. I was tied up, see."

And then because he couldn't resist it, he pulled her into a doorway and flipped through his roll for her. "Look!" he said exultantly. "Four hundred and thirty-two bucks! I really scored big."

"Honey!" she whispered, excited. "How did you do it?"

Billy looked pleased and wise,

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and rumpled her hair from the nape to the crown. Then he said, "Come on, baby doll, let's get going. Let's celebrate!"

But Franny drew back. There were some things she couldn't permit. "Wait," she said suspiciously. "Is that—her dough?"

He put his head to one side, crowing with laughter. He laughed for quite a long time, and tweaked her nose and shook her gently by the chin.

"Her?" he said at last, with contempt, with disgust. "She don't even know about it."

That much was true. He had got back to town that morning, separating from Nektar at the railroad station, at her request. He'd made his big score that night, unexpectedly. It was too good to keep to himself, and when Nektar's telephone hadn't answered, not even the fourth time he'd tried it, the thought of Franny had occurred to him. Poor kid, he'd said to himself, she'd appreciate a little attention.

And she did. She was flattered, mollified, reassured and even grateful. He'd come straight to her, hadn't he?—because naturally she didn't know that he'd tried Nektar first. He was being so sweet and so cute; he was making her laugh. He had taken her to an after-hours place, where there was no curfew, where you could drink till dawn if you liked and could afford it. And tonight he could afford it. He was showing her a wonderful time.

But she was watchful too. She was bothered by his overstimulation. Before they got back to her room, her oblique curiosity and the liquor he drank had conspired with his vanity to loosen his tongue. But perhaps, Franny thought, it was more than vanity. She observed his jerky movements and listened to his loud laughter, which had about it the tinny sound of bravado. She wondered: was he troubled? was he maybe even scared?

He was still cautious. He didn't tell her much. But as it turned out, he told her enough.

He had met an elderly party from the West Coast in a hotel bar. Which hotel bar, he didn't say. She could picture him at his most engaging, using his youth and his dimples for all they were worth. She knew how these things were done, and pieced together a story that was vague in detail but accurate in outline: the stranger's invitation to the suite, and Billy's casual, noncommittal acceptance; once upstairs, the sudden change from his boyish manner, the new hard voice and the tough short words; the threats, the money handed over, the quick getaway down the back stairs. It had been easy. It was commonplace.

But a few minutes after they got to her place, Billy took off his pale blue jacket, and Franny

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looked at his shirt. It was a shirt he'd bought about a month ago, gray-green and shiny, and he was proud of it.

"Hey," said Franny, "what's that?" She was pointing at the stain.

He looked innocent, then rightly concluded that she knew very well what it was. He smiled and rumpled her hair and answered softly.

"Little girls shouldn't ask so many questions."

Franny turned away, as though it was a small matter anyhow. "I guess nobody gives up four hundred bucks without an argument," she said.

And Billy said, "That's right, baby doll," and kissed her, and thought no more about it. But he had made one mistake. He had tossed a package of matches on the table earlier that night, and Franny had it. Franny had kept it, and looked at it now, after Billy had gone home. It had the name of the hotel on its cover.

That name leaped out at her from a red headline the next afternoon. She read the story quickly, numbly, but without surprise. Part of her had known all along that this would happen.

"Oh, Billy, Billy, Billy," she said almost aloud as she read, and when she had finished, she put the paper aside and closed her eyes. She thought, "He's a murderer." Simply, flatly, a statement. "He's a murderer and I love him. It should make a difference, but it doesn't."

She tried to fasten her mind on the details she had just read: the overturned arm-chair; the bottle, used as a bludgeon; the wallet on the carpet, next to the body, empty; the blood and the brains all around. But these were simply facts with which she had no connection. They didn't matter at all. He was Billy Lane, and she loved him.

Had he known last night? Not that his victim was dead—she was sure he hadn't known that. She guessed if you were in a hurry, it was hard to tell.

But today he knew. When he unlocked his door for her a few minutes later, he gave her no greeting; he didn't even look at her; he threw himself back on the bed, where it was clear that he'd been lying for a long time. The ash-tray was full; the newspaper was on the floor beside him. He kept staring at the ceiling with a kind of fixed expression in his eyes. He looked sick. He looked actually green, under the tan. He looked terrified.

"Something I musta ate," he muttered after a while. "Or maybe all that drinking—"

"Yes, honey," she said. "Yes, honey."

She had to leave him to go to work, and when she got back he

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was still lying there, with the little radio turned on softly.

"Did you sleep, honey?" she asked him.

"No," he said.

"Did you have anything to eat?"

"No," he said.

"You better get up. You better come to my place and let me fix you something."

Billy Lane thought quickly. They wouldn't come for him at her place, probably. At least, they wouldn't come there right away. And maybe, with company, he wouldn't keep hearing and seeing those things, over and over and over. The thud of the bottle. The look on that face. The blood. Especially the blood—it made him sick, it made him want to die.

The faintest smile at Franny was all that he could manage. "Baby doll," he said, "you're good people."

He stayed with her for a week. He didn't go out at all. He just lay there. The nights were the worst. He had the willies at night, and if he slept, he wished he hadn't. Franny suggested that they leave the light on, but that didn't help. Neither did the radio, playing softly. Nothing helped.

Franny behaved as if this were all the most natural thing in the world. When he listened to the news reports on the radio, when he leaped for the paper she brought in, even when she woke up trembling to hear him cry out in the night, she never let on. It was just the ptomaine, she told him. There was a lot of it around. She nursed him, waited on him, cooked all his meals. She said, "Are you comfy, honey?" and arranged the pillows and said, "There! Is that better?" She took good care of him.

Actually, she was very happy, because she had him all to herself now. He was hers, and she could do for him. She hummed snatches of juke-box tunes, and sometimes danced a little, as she moved around the room. She even found herself forgetting for whole minutes why he was there.

Billy never forgot. It was true that by the end of the week, his fear of arrest had diminished. The story had moved off the front pages, and now the inside pages had dropped it too. The police had got nowhere at all. But there were still the nights, there were always the nights, and always his own brain, playing it over and over again like a record, whenever he closed his eyes.

On Sunday he nearly broke down and told Franny all about it, just for the relief of sharing it, just to have her take him in her arms and pat his shoulder and say, "Don't worry, honey, it'll be all right, it'll be all right."

That frightened him. Franny was too close. He'd caught himself

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that time, but he knew that if he stayed around, he'd be sure to tell her, sooner or later. He needed people who didn't know so much about him. People he could bluff. People who would let him forget that what had lately happened, had happened to him. He must clear out.

Once that decision was reached, his old assurance returned. For the first time in a week he felt fine. He made his plan, and then wandered around the room, snapping his fingers, impatient to carry it out.

"What's eating you, honey?" Franny asked, and he said, "Nothing, nothing at all," and went on snapping his fingers.

He waited till she had gone out to the grocery store, and then waited a few minutes longer, to give her time to get clear. Cursing, he fumbled about the room in search of a dime, and then he had to wait again—endlessly, it seemed—while the woman from across the hall took her time about getting off the telephone. At last, after two busy signals, he got through to Nektar.

But she was angry at the week's neglect; it took quite a while to make her listen to him. He pleaded and protested, he told her he'd had the ptomaine, he was very appealing and very cute, and finally she softened.

"All right, darlin'," she drawled. "When? Tonight?"

"Tonight, baby doll."

He fixed the hour and hung up, whistling. And when he turned, Franny was standing behind him, with a brown paper bag of groceries in her arms.

She didn't say anything. She marched ahead of him into the kitchenette and started dinner, viciously scratching matches, banging the skillet, rattling plates, so that her self-pity and rage spoke loud in the silent room. She knew that everything she had done for him, she had done freely, voluntarily, eagerly even, and that if she hadn't she wouldn't have held him a week. But now both her generosity and his ingratitude seemed boundless.

The meal was underdone. They ate it tensely, in silence, avoiding each other's eyes, and when it was over, he pushed back his chair and lit a cigarette. Very deliberately, he went to the mirror and combed his dark yellow hair, noticing that he needed a haircut. He tied a big knot in his tie. He hitched his slacks above his hips. He started for the door.

And for the first time Franny spoke. "Honey," she said. That was all. It didn't sound very affectionate either.

He stopped. "Yeah?" Quietly. Dangerous.

"Don't go to see her. Please don't go to see her."

She said it steadily, her eyes on

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him, big and dark, like conscience.

"Knock it off," he said, thin-lipped and when she started to speak again, he interrupted quickly. "You and me are all washed up. Finished. Through. Get it?" And that made Franny lose her head.

She sprang up and gripped the table—her eyes narrowed and vengeful, her black hair suddenly disshevelled. Looking at her now, Billy thought she was like a witch. He thought she was crazy. He wondered what he had ever seen in her.

She was trembling all over—he could hear the high vibration of the china on the table. He listened to her words, savage, rasping, choked with tears, as she listed all the items of her grievance—the meals, the money, the wasted love through a whole year of her life. He arranged his face in its what're-you-going-to-do-about-it look, while in a remote corner of his mind he thought, "She's really broken up." He thought it not with pity for her, but with applause for himself. He had done this. He had caused it. He must be quite a guy.

Tauntingly then, she reminded him of the past few days when he'd needed her, when he'd been too sick with fear to get off the bed. She yelled, "You punk! You frightened little punk!" and he laughed in her face. But when she produced the package of matches, he went suddenly very still.

"Here, take a look at this!" she said, and held it so that he couldn't snatch it from her. Gloating she told him that his secret wasn't a secret after all; she knew it too, and had from the start. "Go on, get out, go to her!" she said, desperate now because she had lost him; and finally, sobbing so that her words were almost incomprehensible, she spoke the threat that all the time she had dreaded to hear herself make: "So help me God, five minutes after you're out that door, I'll be down at the precinct telling them what I know!"

She wasn't sure even then that she would ever have the courage to do it, but she observed that Billy, at any rate, seemed convinced. His bravado melted as she watched him. She saw with satisfaction the sudden moisture on his forehead. She welcomed the look of terror back into his eyes.

He said uncertainly, "You wouldn't do that," and then he tried to bluff. "Go ahead. Tell them. See if I care." He even managed to stammer out a laugh, full of fake derision. "The cover of a match-box. That isn't evidence. You can't prove nothing. Neither can they."

But of course they could. It was easy when a suspect was

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scared. They could tie him in knots, quickly, and she could see that he knew it. He just stood there with a foolish, incredulous half-smile on his face, and this time Franny spoke almost sweetly. "You don't want to go to her anyhow, do you? Aren't you afraid you'll talk in your sleep?"

The effect of that was immediate. He stared at her, then his knees seemed to fold, and he was sitting down. He spoke dry-lipped with no voice: "Did I?"

Harshly she laughed. "You know it!" she said.

And now a silence began, extended itself, never seemed to end. A tap in the kitchenette dripped at irregular intervals. A car hummed by in the street. In the room, nobody moved. Billy sat very erect, looking almost propped up. He kept fumbling with his knuckles. Franny couldn't understand the expression on his face. His mouth was still almost a smile, but he was staring past her. He seemed to be thinking, hard.

It made her apprehensive that she didn't know what he was thinking. She began to worry that perhaps she had said too much. She had an impulse to go to him, to touch him—for her own reassurance, not his. But there was something that made it impossible to move. He seemed to be at the center of a magic circle across which she couldn't venture.

Soon she was contrite, and ready to take back all her threats, to blame them on anger, to say she had been kidding. But those eyes that didn't look at her stopped her. She said nothing.

And when at last he moved, she caught her breath. She watched his hand climb slowly up his shirt, loosen his tie, unbutton his collar, pull the tie off and toss it aside. He settled back in his chair. He was staying.

"Honey—" she said, all gratitude, but he showed no sign that he heard her. Then she said, "Look." She held up the package of matches, and tore it into little bits that fell on the table top. "See? See?"

The dimple flickered, but that was all.

She tried again: "If you want to call her—if you want to tell her that you can't make it—"

But he shook his head. Still looking past her.

She smiled at him, trying to communicate all the warmth of her heart, to penetrate and engulf him with it. She thought, "No wonder I love him—see how cute he is. And he doesn't mean bad. He knows it would break my heart if he went out with her. And he doesn't care for her—he's not even going to phone her—"

She let her love persuade her and betray her, though when a moment later she saw that he was looking at her—suddenly, full at

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her—a little shock of fear went through her. But he was smiling, and his eyes, no longer opaque, were boyish, innocent, bright; and when at last he even found his voice, she thought, "It's over—the trouble's over."

"Baby doll," he said, "you don't have to go to work tonight, do you?"

"Not if you don't want me to, honey. I'll just stay away."

"Let's be together—just you and me. Let's forget all about fighting. Huh?"

"Yes!" she said eagerly. "Yes!"

"We'll have a little party—all by ourselves—right here." He laughed. He was very gay. "How about it?"

Now it was all right to cross the room and go into his arms. "Oh, honey," said said, "I love you, honey." She said it over and over. She whispered it, she crooned it, she wept it a little. She nestled close against him. "We'll always be together," she said. "We'll never leave each other. We'll be together forever and ever and ever . . . Hm?"

His lips caressed her ear. "That's right, baby doll," he whispered. "That's right . . ."

But over her head his glance had sidled away. It wandered to the kitchenette. It lingered there, long and seriously.

Billy had made up his mind.

It was nearly one-thirty before Franny fell asleep at last. All evening, Billy had been very careful about his own drinking. He was pleased with his performance, which he had gauged to Franny's increasing intoxication, keeping step with it stage for stage, so that now his head was clear, and she lay stretched on the bed, mouth open, snoring.

He smoothed his hair and put on his tie and jacket. Then he turned off the light. Franny stirred on the bed.

"Honey . . ."

"Yeah?"

There was a pause, and she said at last, remotely: "Window . . ."

"Huh?"

"Open . . . window."

"Sure."

It was already open. He made quite a lot of noise opening it further, then waited, and slowly, gently, softly, pulled it down again. Tight.

"So long, baby doll."

No answer. He stood there a minute, two minutes, and tested her again.

"See you tomorrow?"

And after another silence: "Baby doll?"

Out, he thought. Like a light.

He tiptoed to the kitchenette. He was very clear and sure. He flipped the levers of the two burners, then those of the oven and broiler. He had nothing to worry about: this stove was old and had

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no pilot light. There was a rushing sound and a sweet smell.

He hesistated just an instant, then opened the door. A hinge creaked, and creaked again as he closed the door behind him. There was the sharp quiet click of the lock. He listened. No sound.

Then he inhaled sharply. Was that her voice, muffled and sleepy, calling him? Saying "Honey . . . ?" Was it?

He couldn't be sure. He would never be sure. He pattered downstairs and out to the street. He looked above him briefly, found the closed, dark window, looked away again. He was still standing in the doorway when he saw the policeman. He stiffened, and couldn't move. The cop had just turned the corner and was coming towards him, banging his stick against the railing.

Billy said to himself, "Move. Walk slowly." He walked directly towards the cop. They passed each other without exchanging a glance. At the corner Billy didn't look back.

There were eleven blocks to his rooming house. He could have done it in ten, but that route passed a church and he had long since worked out a detour. Eleven, he thought. Seven, come eleven. Lucky. Funny, he'd never thought of that before. But why did people stare at him as he went by—that man and girl, for instance? Or had they? He couldn't tell. Nothing showed on his face, did it? No. He smiled. How could it? He walked on. Slowly, he kept reminding himself. Slowly. Slowly.

A sudden voice startled him: "Hey, Jack spare a nickel for a cup of coffee?"

"No, goddamn it, no!"

It was a very old man, with the fawning look of a dog. Billy hadn't seen him step out of the shadow. Frightened, the old man retreated now.

Billy realized he'd shouted. Mistake, he thought. Call attention. Don't do that again.

He walked on slowly, quietly, through the muffled night-time sounds of the city. When he was about to cross the avenue, there was a wail, a shriek, a clamor. An ambulance hurtled by. Billy recoiled, stood trembling on the curb. An ambulance. A broken mirror would have been bad enough, but an ambulance . . . He closed his eyes, he counted, leaning against the base of a street-lamp, until the siren howled into the distance and died away.

"Take it easy," he said to himself. "Take it easy."

But now for the first time he thought of Franny, lying on the bed, while that sweet smell gathered in invisible clouds . . . "Shh . . . Shh . . ." He had a moment's impulse to run back to bang on her door, shouting "Franny!

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Wake up! Wake up!" She was a good kid, really; she was good people. But it wasn't remorse. It was fear. The ambulance had made him afraid.

He fought the impulse down, and walked on.

By the time he got home he was calm again. He climbed the three flights to his room as though it was any night, hearing his unstealthy footsteps, hearing the squeak of the boards, passing the single dim light on the landings, and the closed, numbered doors, and the sounds of sleeping on the other side. Man comes home, a little earlier than usual, he thought. That was all.

But he found himself fumbling with his key in the lock he'd installed. As if he was drunk. He had to hold the tip of the key between thumb and forefinger, and guide it in. It surprised him, because he was so calm.

It was two when he got to his room. He put on the light over the chiffonier, looked at himself in the mirror and smiled. He turned on the radio, as he always did, no louder than a whisper, and stretched on the bed, head on hands, listening to the disc-jockey. ". . . and now, Sally Costello and Slim, of 1413 Garden Street, want to hear Tex Beneke's record of—sorry, Sally and Slim, we haven't got Tex's record—someone broke it—but we'll play you the Duke's—"

The idea of leaving came sudden and complete. He looked at his watch. Three-forty-five. Of course—pack your bags. Get down to the bus station. Take the first bus west. Or east or north or south. Anywhere. Get out of town.

He was quiet and expert about it. Careful but fast. He finished the brown suitcase first, laying in the pastel slacks, the vivid shirts, the bright ties, stuffing the corners with crumpled shorts for the laundry. One or two things he discarded. They weren't worn out, he was just sick of them; they didn't look sharp any more.

The radio whispered on, and he hummed with it. Now the canvas bag—the handkerchiefs, the sweaters, the comic books, the miscellaneous staff. He'd leave five bucks for the landlady. He'd take a taxi to the bus station. Or no—the subway was safer. He'd take the subway.

It was a long time since he'd been on the move. It excited him and made him happy. He was going to get away.

He wasn't quite sure when the tapping started. "Got a request for The Happy Song," the disc jockey had announced faintly. Billy had been snapping his fingers, humming, whispering the lyrics as he moved around the room. "I want the world to be happy—with me!" And then he'd become aware of this other sound, after it had been going on for a

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while. Tapping on the door. Confidential. Soft, so as not to disturb anyone. One two three—pause. Tap tap tap—wait. A fingernail on the wooden door.

Billy stopped dead in the middle of the room. He forgot to breathe. Tap tap tap—and that short, questioning pause. He tiptoed to the door and put his ear against it. Silence on the other side. He smiled.

"Better get out of here," he thought. "I'm hearing things."

He had turned back to the canvas bag when it started again. Patient. Someone waiting. Someone sure that sooner or later he'd hear.

"Yeah?" said Billy.

His voice startled him. It was too loud. It trembled. It sounded scared.

And then he heard the other voice, hardly louder than a breath. "Open up." Was that what it said? He walked to the door again. Listened. Silence.

"Yeah?"

And very faint, from the other side: "Honey . . . open up."

Franny's voice?

"Wait a minute."

Quick—shove the suitcase under the bed, yank the bed cover off throw it over the canvas bag, rumple the sheet, unbutton your shirt, muss your hair. Make this good. Look straight at her. Be surprised.

He opened the door. "Baby doll!" he said, grinning, sounding delighted to see her and a little questioning.

She was very self-possessed. The dark eyes were serene, the wide mouth smiling. She was, as always, neat, slightly too solid, sweet. She walked in with soft composure, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, and sat down, looking at him.

What went wrong? he thought. Had that quiet hissing stopped? Why was she here?—But be natural. Say nothing.

It was as though she had heard him thinking. "I got lonesome," she said. "I wanted to see you."

"Happy, happy, happy," murmured the radio, "I want the world to be happy—with me!"

"Yes," said Billy, "I know—yes—but it's so late!"

"I missed you," she answered. The gentle eyes had never wavered. And now she added, in a voice full of stillness and love: "You know, like I said. We'll never leave each other. We'll always be together, forever and forever and forever . . ."

There was no threat in it. It was simply a statement of fact. Yet somehow he was terrified. His heart stepped up its beat.

"That's right—sure—that's right," he said quickly, with a nervous laugh, and wondered again what had happened to his foolproof plan.

"I woke up and you were gone,"

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she went on. It all sounded so simple. She was calm, and she didn't move. It made him jumpy. "I had an awful headache, honey, and so I lit a cigarette and—"

On the radio the Happy Song had come to an end, and now the disc-jockey's voice was back. Confidential. Your pal, whispering in the night.

"News-flash . . ." he said. "Terrible explosion on the west side . . . building gutted . . . streets littered with glass for blocks around . . . No estimate yet of the number of dead . . ." And then he gave the address.

"Golly!" said Billy, gasping. "That's your house, baby doll—"

She nodded.

He realized that he was panting. "But why didn't you tell me? Are you all right?"

She nodded.

"How did you ever get away?"

Franny looked at him steadily out of eyes whose lustre had gone flat. She smiled, and it seemed to Billy that her face was ever so slightly beginning to resemble a skull.

She answered very simply. "I didn't," she said.

Three flights down, the landlady sprang up in bed as the noise began. It was a horrifying sound that chilled her, and it didn't stop. Even after she had put on a wrapper and padded to the telephone to call the police, it hadn't stopped. It was still going on when they arrived.

The door had a special lock and they had to break it down. The terrible sounds inside continued while they hammered and banged. And when they finally entered, they found a boy-faced, blond young man, huddled in the corner of his bed, babbling and shrieking at an empty chair.

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John Anthony West, former editorial assistant on The Magazine's staff, once owned a pointed black beard and a Porsche automobile. He now owns a pointed black beard and lives on the Balearic island of Ibiza, having financed his migration to and first year's residence on the latter by selling the former... On reflection, it seems that this last sentence is far from clear: the automobile it was he sold, not the beard. His collection of short stories, Call Out The Malicia, *of which the following Report forms part, is soon to be published by Dutton's; his not-easily-forgotten story, GEORGE (F&SF, June, 1961), is scheduled for off-Broadway production as a play. Mr. West, when not engaged in contemplating the wine-dark (or as some will have it—the tideless, dolorous, midland) sea, and other pleasant occupations of a Mediterranean nature, is working on his novel,* Osborne's Army. *If readers of GEORGE required any further evidence that his attitude towards the sacred covenent of marriage was less than dewy-eyed, here they have it. Mr. West, we understand, is still a bachelor. We ourself are not; and we shall regard any attempt on the part of our wife to ply us with supernumary victuals, with the very deepest of suspicions.*

GLADYS'S GREGORY

by John Anthony West

LADIES, MEMBERS OF THE club, I am honoured to be here today, to tell you about this year's contest in our community, and this year's contest winner, Gladys's Gregory. And I want to thank you all for your interest and for your kind attention.

I begin with statistics from the medical record. Gladys's Gregory upon his arrival at our community.

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Height:	6'5½"
Weight:	242
Chest:	49"
Waist:	36"
Neck:	18½"

I anticipate your admiration, Ladies. Therefore, let me present the dark side of the coin immediately. Gregory, upon arriving, was 28 years old, yet his weight had scarcely changed since his college days when he was an All American Football player. He had been married three *full* years. Club-members! Please jump to no hasty conclusions. Hear me out before you heap blame on Gladys. Bear in mind that here, true, we have Gregory; 242 pounds of raw material. But this figure had not changed for *eight* years.

Unfortunately, I admit, the women of our community did not view the situation objectively either. "Gladys's fault", they shouted and indignation ran rampant.

We thought of Beth Shaefer who had brought her Milton from a gangling 164 to 313 pounds in less than three years; Sally O'Leary with three strikes against her at the onset, her Jamie an ex-jockey, fighting gamely nevertheless and bringing him out finally at 245; Joan Granz who nursed her Marvin to 437 and a second prize despite his dangerous cardiac condition. Certainly, all of you can appreciate our feelings.

Now, Gladys's Gregory was football coach and one day, driving past the stadium, the first clue to a nasty situation revealed itself. Gladys's Gregory was participating in the *actual* physical exercise.

I saw him hurl himself repeatedly at a stuffed dummy; saw him lead five minutes of strenuous calisthenics; then, undaunted, lead his team in a race around the track. The bitterest among Gladys's enemies would be forced to admit that perhaps it wasn't her fault entirely. To this day I see the flesh-building calories dripping from his pores in perspiration.

The next morning I paid a call on Gladys. She was a sweet young thing; far from the malicious vixen rumor had painted her. I recounted the stadium scene and poor Gladys knew it all too well. She had even stranger tales to tell. He mowed the lawn with a *hand* mower; played handball off season; ran the two miles from the school to his home in a tracksuit. The girl was desolate.

We discussed his diet and I was shocked beyond words. Red meat! She fed him red meat; and fish, and eggs, and green vegetables . . .

"Eclairs!" I shouted at her. "Potatoes! Chocolate layer cake! Beer! Butter!"

But no. Gregory hated these things. Wouldn't touch them.

"He doesn't love you," I said.

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"But he does," Gladys moaned, her voice cracking, "in his own way he does."

I suggested the strategy that was so often effective when contests had not yet gained their present popularity and opposition was stronger.

As we all know, we have more sexual stamina than our mates. A wife, subtly camouflaging her motives under the attractive cover of passion, can reduce a husband to a state of sexual fatigue in a matter of weeks. And a sexually sated husband is ripe for intelligent handling. Evening after evening he sits quietly. Eating. He marshals his energies for the night ahead and gradually he puts on weight. At a certain point his obesity interferes with his virility and at this point the intelligent wife beings to demand less. The husband, by this time swathed in comfortable flesh, is only too happy to be let alone. Now, the wife decreases her demands to nothing and the husband, carrying no burden of calorie-consuming anxiety, prepares for the contest.

With Gladys's Gregory, this method proved futile. After a month's trial Gladys was but a shadow of her former self while Gregory was seen everywhere, with his squad, mowing the lawn, his unsightly muscles bulging, a smug grin on his face.

At a special community meeting an ingenious plan was devised. We would make Gladys and Gregory the most socially prominent couple in the community. They soon found their social calendar booked solid; dinners, breakfasts, buffets, picnics . . . Gregory found himself seated down to tables groaning with carbohydrates. He was under constant surveillance. No sooner had he wiped the whipped cream from his lips before a plate mountain high in ice cream, bristling with macaroons, was thrust before him. His mug of beer never reached the halfway mark before some vigilant wife refilled it for him.

At this time, Ladies, I must point out that Gregory was in no way a conscious rebel; nor was he malicious or subversive. We must set aside his foolish notions of physical culture and regard him as he was; a charming man and an ideal husband; affable, reticent, and quite unintelligent. The militant fury of our community women soon gave way to a genuine solicitousness. And a beaming Gladys reported that he was wearing his belt out two notches.

A carefully coached Gladys waged psychological warfare. Magazines were left open about the house, all of them turned to calorie-rich advertisements. At parties she flirted openly with the heftiest husbands still allowed free.

By spring Gregory weighed an estimated 290. Bewildered, he

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still clung to his old notions. "Gotta get in shape for spring training," he would mumble, his mouth filled with chocolate *mousse*.

At 310 our cooperative spirit dwindled. The women, all at once, realized what they had wrought and were horrified by the prospect.

Meanwhile Gladys, grown confident, moved swiftly and with brilliant technical strategy. She consulted a fortune teller who hinted to her that, given the chance, her Gregory would founder himself on brazil nuts. She bought a trial pound and they were gone in five minutes.

Well, Ladies, brazil nuts! It was the last straw. Calorie filled brazil nuts. Community spirit turned to a hostile chill and then to virulent envy. He couldn't stop eating brazil nuts! Anxious eyes searched hopefully for the tell-tale signs of arrested development; the tight skin and fishy-eyed expression that signifies that a husband is nearing peak despite his apparent potential. We looked for hints of unsightly bloating. But at 325 Gregory was barely filling out. On his own he developed a taste for sweets.

The contest of that year was pure anticlimax. Jenny Schultz's Peter took a first at 423 but the prodigious Gregory was on the minds of all.

Shortly after, Gladys, contrary to expectation, put her Gregory into seclusion. It was the cause of hope. Certainly Gladys had overplayed her hand and had sacrificed strategy for youthful impetuosity. But her self-confidence incensed the ladies of our community.

For the first time in history our women banded together in an effort to counteract Gregory's impending victory. Surely the emotions that prompted this action were not entirely commendable but, Ladies, put yourself in our place. Would you be willing to undergo the heartache, the effort, even the expense of preparing a husband for a contest whose outcome was obvious in advance?

How long would it take her to prepare her Gregory? This was the burning question. The average husband takes three or four years, as we all know. Certainly Gregory was a special case. Four years for him would mean excess flab. Three years seemed most logical but with Gregory, two years did not seem impossible and Gladys had already displayed eagerness and impatience. It was the studied opinion of our community that Gladys would enter Gregory in two years. Therefore, it was but a simple matter for the rest to hold their husbands for a different year. Should Gregory be the only entry, his would be a hollow victory.

Our solution was bold but

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strong. The women made an agreement to enter their husbands the following year despite the fact that many would not have reached peak. It was felt that should a three year plan misfire (as it might through a slip of the tongue, chicanery, a thousand reasons) four or five years of seclusion would be unbearable for all wives concerned and of course with husbands, decline is most rapid after peak has been attained. Women whose husbands had been in seclusion under a year were permitted to breach the contract.

A period of curious tension ensued. Gladys's arrogance was hidden beneath a cover of interest in community affairs while the other women masked their complicity and hatred under the guise of cameraderie in the face of healthy competition.

Gladys took to having provisions delivered; quarter kegs of beer, bushels of potatoes, sacks of flour. Oh yes! She would set a record in two years but it would be a wasted triumph.

And then she could outdo herself. We all remembered Elizabeth Bent's Darius who, several years earlier, having had almost the potential of a Gregory, and eager to set a record, had allowed himself to be pushed too hard. He died six weeks before the contest; a sensational but disqualified 621.

With the contest a month away Gregory was forgotten. True, this year's contest lacked the element of surprise. Everyone (but Gladys) knew which other husbands would be shown. The probable winner could be guessed with reasonable accuracy . . . but still, a contest is a contest and the air was charged with the familiar bitter rivalry.

Contest day dawned hot and bright, and an excited crowd gathered at the stadium. This year, of course, there was little of that intense speculation: Who was entered by surprise; who was staying another year in seclusion?

But five minutes before the procession one question rippled through the audience. Has anyone seen Gladys? An expectant audience become a feverish one. Necks craned. Sharp eyes searched the crowd. She was not to be seen. A murmur of anger swept the stands. Could she have prepared her Gregory in a single year? No! No! It could not be done.

The band struck up and slowly the gaily painted, bunting-draped trucks passed before the stand. Twenty-six in all. How many women had entered the agreement to show their husbands. Twenty-five? Twenty-six? No one remembered.

The trucks circled the field. Attention was divided between the parade and the entrance to catch Gladys's expected tardy arrival among the spectators.

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The fanfare rose brassy and shrill and the trucks halted. The wives debouched from the cabs and stood before their vehicles. We all know the tension of this moment; as the audience takes in the line of wives at a glance; sees two dozen or more women dressed in their best; tries, at the same time, to remember those who might have been there and are not. That tense moment when years of planning, hoping, working, scheming, unfold too quickly . . . But in this split second all eyes focussed on one person, and one person alone. Gladys.

She stood before her truck, stunning in white organdy, fresh as a daisy; showing nothing of what must have been a tense and lonely ordeal; not a single wrinkle was visible; not a strand of hair astray. I could feel hatred gathering in a storm.

The other wives in the contest glared helplessly at Gladys. The trumpet sounded and the wives released the covers of their trucks. It was the breathless instant when the husbands stood revealed. But this time, every eye focussed on truck seventeen: Gladys's Gregory.

There was no applause; none of the usual wild cheering; nothing but an awed silence. In that single moment every wife present knew that her own small hopes were forever extinguished. They that never, never in their maddest daydreams had they conceived of a Gregory.

He stood as though rooted to the back of the truck; monolithic. His face missed that bloated look usually found on the truly elephantine husbands; his brow was furrowed in thick folds of flesh; his cheeks, neither flabby nor swollen, hung in rich jowls like steaks. His neck was a squat cone leading unbroken into shoulders so gigantic that instead of easing into the inevitable paunch he seemed to drop sheer. He was perfect. A pillar; a block; a mountain; solid and immobile. He turned slowly, proudly. Front face, profile, rear view, front face. His weight was incalculable. He was bigger, heavier, more immense, more beautiful than anything we had ever witnessed. Hatred in the audience turned to despair. Our grand-daughter might beg to hear about Gladys's Gregory, but *we* had seen him. For us there would be no more contests. Not a woman among us thought of Gladys's original torments; her years of social ostracism. But how could they?

The weighing began and the audience cursed and fretted. Sixteen before Gregory. The winches lifted the husbands to the weighing platform and the results were announced: 345, 376, 268 (someone laughed), 417, 430 (someone clapped—a relative no doubt), 386, 344. Not a flurry of

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interest. The dismayed wives who had worked and schemed for years for this opportunity; who asked only for fair competition, wept openly. 403, 313. The wait seemed endless.

Gregory was next but Gladys had a surprise in store. As the men went to adjust the slings on Gregory, Gladys waved them off. She attached a strong pipe ladder to the truck and ponderously, but without hesitation, Gregory descended.

He was still able to walk!

Shoulders thrown back to balance his magnificent bulk, he swayed and lurched toward the stairs that led to the platform. He tested the frail bannister and it sundered. Using a section of the rail as a cane he veered up the stairs while a breathless crowd waited for the sound of breaking planks. The stairs groaned but held and Gregory made his own way to the scale.

Well, Ladies, what difference does the actual figure make? It was all over. After seeing Gregory cold statistics were irrelevant. The figure, however, was 743 pounds.

Gregory turned slowly, proudly, on the scale and smiled. There was no applause but, first singly, then in groups, then en masse the audience stood. Even jealousy and hatred were powerless in the presence of the contestant who would stand as a monument to Gladys and our community, and as an inspiration to the world.

Now, Ladies, I wish, I only wish that I could finish this report on the note that such a performance deserves. Unfortunately one incident marred the perfection of Gladys's Gregory's victory.

Our club, like all others, has always adhered to the tacit but traditional practice: *The contest winner is permitted to choose the manner in which he would like to be served.*

Gladys's Gregory, however, out of sheet spite (the argument still rages on this point), or hearkening back to some primitive instinct, demanded to be served raw.

Having no precedent to act upon; and fearing to break so time-honored a custom we complied reluctantly with the request, creating acute physical discomfort for many and an acute physical revulsion in all. A motion is now under discussion in our community which will, in the future, relieve the contest winner of this responsibility. In view of our unfortunate experience, Ladies, it is part of my mission here today to urge you and your club, and all other clubs to pass a similar amendment at your earliest convenience.

I thank you for bearing with me, Ladies. ◀

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No man knoweth the number of stories and articles written by Robert Silverberg; to list even the titles of the books this incredibly fecund writer has produced in his 28 years would occupy more space than this story does. We will content ourself for now by telling you that suave, soft-spoken, trim-bearded Mr. Silverberg now lives in Riverdale with his handsome wife, Barbara, is the author of WARM MAN (F&SF, May 1957) and THE MAN WHO NEVER FORGOT (F&SF, Feb. 1958), collects old Chinese musical instruments, tastes wines of good vintage, and reflects on such perpetual problems as

THE NATURE OF THE PLACE

by Robert Silverberg

AT THE AGE OF TWENTY, PAUL Dearborn first reached the conviction that he would ultimately go to hell. He worried over it, but not for very long.

At the age of forty, the idea of going to hell positively appealed to him. Heaven would be so dull, after all.

But by the time he was sixty, he was just a bit uneasy again. "It's not that I'm afraid of it," he said one night after two beers too many. The shabby little man standing next to him at the bar only smiled. "I'm not afraid at all," Paul repeated firmly. "Just—uneasy."

"How can you be so sure you're going there?" the little man wanted to know.

"Oh, I've never doubted it," Paul said. "And I don't feel bitter, mind you. I've had a rather pleasant life," he said untruthfully, "and I'm prepared to pay the price. I've got no complaint coming. Another beer?'

"Don't mind if I do," the little man said.

Paul signalled the bartender for refills. "I know where I'm heading, all right," he went on. "But the damned *uncertainty* bothers me. If I only knew what the place was like—"

The little man's eyes gleamed. "Faith, man, it's hot and smelling

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of brimstone there, and the sinners are roasting in the lake of fire, and right in the heart of it all is the old devil himself, up on his throne with his horns sharp as swords, and his tail going *flick-flick* like a cat's."

Paul chuckled patronizingly. "Oh, no, I can't buy that. Straight out of 1910 Sunday School lessons. Hellfire and brimstone just won't convince me."

The other shrugged. "Well, if you want to be an individual—"

"That's just it," Paul said, smacking the palm of his hand against the counter. "Hell's such an *individual* thing."

His companion lapsed into silence, contemplating with bleary eyes the suds at the bottom of his beer glass. Paul had another round, then looked at his watch, decided it was about time to leave for home. He dropped a bill on the counter and sauntered out. *I'll get what I deserve,* he told himself firmly.

He walked toward the bus stop. It was a chilly night, the wind cutting into his bones. He was tired. He lived alone, now; his most recent wife was dead, his children strangers to him. He had few friends. Many enemies.

As he rounded the corner, he paused, wheezing. *My heart. Not much time left now.*

He thought back over his sixty years. The betrayals, the disappointments, the sins, the hangovers. He had some money now, and by some standards he was a successful man. But life hadn't been any joyride. It had been rocky and fear-torn, filled with doubts and headaches, moments of complete despair, others of frustrated rage.

He realized he was more than half glad he was almost at the end of his road. Life, he saw now, had really been a struggle not worth the bother. Sixty years of torture. There was the bus, half a block ahead, and he was going to miss it and have to stand in the cold for twenty minutes. Not very serious? Yes, but multiply it by a million slights and injuries over the years —scowling, he began to run toward the corner.

And stumbled as a cold hand squeezed tight around his heart. The sidewalk sprang up to meet him, and he knew this was death. For a startled instant he fought for control, and then he relaxed as the blackness swept down. He felt gratitude that it was over at long last—and a twinge of curiosity about what was to come.

After an age, he opened his eyes again and looked around. And, in that brief flashing moment before Lethe dimmed his eyes, he knew where Hell was, knew the nature of the place and to what eternal punishment he had been condemned. Paul Dearborn wailed, more in despair than in pain, as the doctor's hand firmly slapped his rear and breath roared into his lungs. ◀

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For some writers the ascent to fame is like climbing Everest in lead galoshes. Some freeze to death without ever reaching the top. Others turn around and go back. The lucky few, however, spring into the public eye and favor almost at their first leap. Such luck, of course, favors only the talented; and among those favored was Richard Matheson, whose first published short story, BORN OF MAN AND WOMAN (F&SF, Summer, 1950), dazzled and horrified, establishing him at once as an author of the first rank. New Jersey born and Brooklyn raised, ex-cheese store clerk, former YMCA counselor, overseas War Veteran, U. of Mo. graduate (Journalism), husband of Ruth Ann, father of Betina and Richard and Alison, Richard Matheson is the author of four screenplays, three short story collections, and seven novels (including the very non-SF, THE BEARDLESS WARRIORS: Little-Brown, 1960). In this unusual story—for story it is, as are all great poems; and song as well, as they all are, too—lament and battle cry and paean of triumph—he reaches deep into the molten hollow of the human heart, the nightmare corner of the American Dream.

THE JAZZ MACHINE

by Richard Matheson

I had the weight that night
I mean I had the blues and no one hides the blues away
You got to wash them out
Or you end up riding a slow drag to nowhere
You got to let them fly
I mean you got to

I play trumpet in this barrelhouse off Main Street

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Never mind the name of it
It's like scumpteen other cellar drink dens
Where the downtown ofays bring their loot and jive talk
And listen to us try to blow out notes
As white and pure as we can never be

Like I told you, I was gully low that night
Brassing at the great White way
Lipping back a sass in jazz that Rone got off in words
And died for
Hitting at the jug and loaded
Spiking gin and rage with shaking miseries
I had no food in me and wanted none
I broke myself to pieces in a hungry night

This white I'm getting off on showed at ten
Collared him a table near the stand
And sat there nursing at a glass of wine
Just casing us
All the way into the late watch he was there
He never budged or spoke a word
But I could see that he was picking up
On what was going down
He got into my mouth, man
He bothered me

At four I crawled down off the stand
And that was when his ofay stood and put his grabber on my arm
"May I speak to you?" he asked
The way I felt I took no shine
To pink hands wrinkling up my gabardine
"Broom off, stud," I let him know
"Please," he said, "I have to speak to you."

Call me blowtop, call me Uncle Tom
Man, you're not far wrong
Maybe my brain was nowhere
But I sat down with Mister Pink

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and told him—lay his racket
"You've lost someone," he said.

It hit me like a belly chord
"What do you know about it, white man?"
I felt that hating pick up tempo in my guts again
"I don't know anything about it," he replied
"I only know you've lost someone
"You've told it to me with your horn a hundred times."
I felt evil crawling in my belly
"Let's get this straight," I said
"Don't hype me, man; don't give me stuff"
"Listen to me then," he said.

"Jazz isn't only music
"It's a language too
"A language born of protest
"Torn in bloody ragtime from the womb of anger and despair
"A secret tongue with which the legions of abused
"Cry out their misery and their troubled hates."

"This language has a million dialects and accents
"It may be a tone of bitter-sweetness whispered in a brass-lined throat
"Or rush of frenzy screaming out of reed mouths
"Or hammering at strings in vibrant piano hearts
"Or pulsing, savage, under taut-drawn hides
"In dark-peaked stridencies it can reveal the aching core of sorrow
"Or cry out the new millennium
"Its voices are without number
"Its forms beyond statistic
"It is, in very fact, *an endless tonal revolution*
"The pleading furies of the damned
"Against the cruelty of their damnation
"I know this language, friend," he said.

"What about my—?" I began and cut off quick
"Your—*what*, friend?" he inquired
"Someone near to you; I know that much

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"Not a woman though; your trumpet wasn't grieving for a woman loss
"Someone in your family; your father maybe
"Or your brother."

I gave him words that tiger prowled behind my teeth
"You're hanging over trouble, man
"Don't break the thread
"Give it to me straight."
So Mister Pink leaned in and laid it down
"I have a sound machine," he said
"Which can convert the forms of jazz
"Into the sympathies which made them
"If, into my machine, I play a sorrowing blues
"From out the speaker comes the human sentiment
"Which felt those blues
"And fashioned them into the secret tongue of jazz."

He dug the same old question stashed behind my eyes
"How do I know you've lost someone?" he asked
"I've heard so many blues and stomps and strutting jazzes
"Changed, in my machine, to sounds of anger, hopelessness and joy
"That I can understand the language now
"The story that you told was not a new one
"Did you think you were inviolate behind your tapestry of woven brass?"

"Don't hype me, man," I said
I let my fingers rigor mortis on his arm
He didn't ruffle up a hair
"If you don't believe me, come and see," he said
"Listen to my machine
"Play your trumpet into it
"You'll see that everything I've said is true."
I felt shivers like a walking bass inside my skin
"Well, will you come?" he asked.

Rain was pressing drum rolls on the roof
As Mister Pink turned tires onto Main Street
I sat dummied in his coupe

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My sacked up trumpet on my lap
Listening while he rolled off words
Like Stacy runnings on a tinkle box

"Consider your top artists in the genre
"Armstrong, Bechet, Waller, Hines
"Goodman, Mezzrow, Spanier, dozens more both male and female
"Jew and Negroes all and why?
"Why are the greatest jazz interpreters
"Those who live beneath the constant gravity of prejudice?
"I think because the scaldings of external bias
"Focus all their vehemence and suffering
"To a hot, explosive core
"And, from this nucleus of restriction
"Comes all manner of fissions, violent and slow
"Breaking loose in brief expression
"Of the tortures underneath
"Crying for deliverance in the unbreakable code of jazz."
He smiled. *"Unbreakable till now,"* he said.

"Rip bop doesn't do it
"Jump and mop-mop only cloud the issue
"They're like jellied coatings over true response
"Only the authentic jazz can break the pinions of repression
"Liberate the heart-deep mournings
"Unbind the passions, give freedom to the longing essence
"You understand?" he asked.
"I understand," I said, knowing why I came.

Inside his room, he flipped the light on, shut the door
Walked across the room and slid away a cloth that covered his machine
"Come here," he said
I suspicioned him of hyping me but good
His jazz machine was just a jungleful of scraggy tubes and wheels
And scumpteen wires boogity-boogity
Like a black snake brawl
I double-o'ed the heap
"That's really in there, man," I said

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And couldn't help but smile a cutting smile
Right off he grabbed a platter, stuck it down
"Heebie-Jeebies; Armstrong
"First, I'll play the record by itself," he said

Any other time I bust my conk on Satchmo's scatting
But I had the crawling heavies in me
And I couldn't even loosen up a grin
I stood there feeling nowhere
While Daddy-O was tromping down the English tongue
Rip-bip-dee-doo-dee-doot-doo!
The Satch recited in his Model T baritone
Then white man threw a switch

In one hot second all the crazy scat was nixed
Instead, all pounding in my head
There came a sound like bottled blowtops scuffling up a jamboree
Like twenty tongue-tied hipsters in the next apartment
Having them a ball
Something frosted up my spine
I felt the shakes do get-off chorus in my gut
And even though I knew that Mister Pink was smiling at me
I couldn't look him back
My heart was set to knock a doorway through my chest
Before he cut his jazz machine

"You see?" he asked.
I couldn't talk. He had the up on me
"Electrically, I've caught the secret heart of jazz
"Oh, I could play you many records
"That would illustrate the many moods
"Which generate this complicated tongue
"But I would like for you to play in my machine
"Record a minutes worth of solo
"Then we'll play the record through the other speaker
"And we'll hear exactly what you're feeling
"Stripped of every sonic superficial. Right?"

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I had to know
I couldn't leave that place no more than fly
So, while white man set his record maker up,
I unsacked my trumpet, limbered up my lip
All the time the heebies rising in my craw
Like ice cubes piling

Then I blew it out again
The weight
The dragging misery
The bringdown blues that hung inside me
Like twenty irons on a string
And the string stuck to my guts with twenty hooks
That kept on slicing me away
I played for Rone, my brother
Rone who could have died a hundred different times and ways
Rone who died, instead, down in the Murder Belt
Where he was born
Rone who thought he didn't have to take that same old stuff
Rone who forgot and rumbled back as if he was a man
And not a spade
Rone who died without a single word
Underneath the boots of Mississippi peckerwoods
Who hated him for thinking he was human
And kicked his brains out for it

That's what I played for
I blew it hard and right
And when I finished and it all came rushing back on me
Like screaming in a black-walled pit
I felt a coat of evil on my back
With every scream a button that held the dark coat closer
Till I couldn't get the air

That's when I crashed my horn on his machine
That's when I knocked it on the floor
And craunched it down and kicked it to a thousand pieces
"You fool!" That's what he called me

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"You damned black fool!"
All the time until I left

I didn't know it then
I thought that I was kicking back for every kick
That took away my only brother
But now it's done and I can get off all the words
I should have given Mister Pink

Listen, white man; listen to me good
Buddy ghee, it wasn't you
I didn't have no hate for you
Even though it was your kind that put my brother
In his final place
I'll knock it to you why I broke your jazz machine

I broke it cause I had to
Cause it did just what you said it did
And, if I let it stand,
It would have robbed us of the only thing we have
That's ours alone
The thing no boot can kick away
Or rope can choke

You cruel us and you kill us
But, listen white man,
These are only needles in our skin
But if I'd let you keep on working your machine
You'd know all our secrets
And you'd steal the last of us
And we'd blow away and never be again
Take everything you want, Man
You will because you have
But don't come scuffling for our souls.

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P. G. Wodehouse tells of the Oxford Professor of Scriptural Knowledge whose snap-course exam always consisted of the same single question: Name the kings of Israel and Judah in chronological order. *The students naturally memorized the list. Informed, finally, by some fink of a colleague, that it was open knowledge that he always asked the same question, he decided to change it. To the horror of his students the next exam demanded that they* Name the Major and the Minor Prophets in chronological order. *They rose as one man and departed, resigned to failing marks. They rose as one man, that is, save for one man, who calmly uncapped his pen and wrote,* "Far be it from me to make invidious distinctions between the Prophets. Rather let us turn to the kings of Israel and Judah, as follows . . . " *That our own Professor Asimov has made himself master of this meretricious technique will be obvious from his article. There is another, non-Wodehouse, version of the story, wherein a professor (we name no names; we have our suspicions) was asked by a colleague why* he *always gave the same questions on his exams.* "It's all right," *he explained.* "I change the answers."

THE LOST GENERATION

by Isaac Asimov

THERE ARE DISADVANTAGES TO EVERY SITUATION, HOWEVER IDEAL it may seem. For instance, by extremely clever maneuvering, I have

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created the image of one who possesses universal knowledge. This, plus the possession of a glittering eye, enables me to browbeat editors (present editor always excepted).

Having brought myself to this ideal pass, however, I find myself occasionally asked to speak on some subject far outside my field of competence. When I then protest (very feebly) that I know nothing about it, there is a loud, jovial laugh in response and a hearty slap on the shoulders and someone says, "Good old Asimov! Always joking!"

Well, I can't allow the destruction of the image, or I might starve to death, so I do the next best thing to knowing my subject; I cheat. I start talking about whatever it is I am supposed to be talking about and then I sneakily change the subject into something I know about.

For instance, last July I found myself staring at an audience of a hundred and fifty specialists in "information retrieval," having agreed to give the featured talk of the evening. By spelling the words "information retrieval" I have just given you all the knowledge I possess on the subject. The talk I proceeded to give was off the cuff (as all my talks are) and is lost forever. However, the following is an approximation of parts of it, anyway—

A magic phrase these days is "information retrieval," the study of devices whereby knowledge, once found, need never be lost again.

So many are the busy minds in scientific research who are hacking away at the jungle of ignorance; so numerous and miscellaneous are the fragmented bits of knowledge so obtained; that keeping all of it safely in hand is a problem indeed.

The information is published in a myriad journals, digested and spewed out again in a thousand reviews, pounded into pulp and summarized in a variety of abstracts, then compressed into invisibility and recorded on miles of microfilm. The net result is that any one needle of information, even a most important and crucial one, found for a moment of time, is in constant danger of being lost, lost, lost in the haystacks upon haystacks that fill the shelves of our technical libraries.

To rescue an important bit of knowledge, to snatch it out of its dusty surroundings, shake it free of obscurement, and hold it up, gleaming, in the light of day, is the purpose of information retrieval. Librarians, scientists, cyberneticists, combine to devise new methods of indexing and cross-filing and hope to transfer the organized information into the colossal and unfailing memory of a computer, in order that at the touch of a punch-code, the machine might bring forth anything that is known on any subject that is desired.

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Thus the devices produced by the advance of modern science will, it is hoped, correct the incapacity of the human mind to keep up with the advance of modern science.

Yet there remains a flaw in this self-corrective process of science, a flaw for which no one has yet proposed a remedy, and one for which no remedy may be possible. It is not enough, after all, to supply a scientist with the information he needs. Once the information is supplied, the scientist must be capable of looking at it and seeing its importance.

This may sound an easy thing to do, this looking at importance and seeing it, but it is not. In fact, it may well be the hardest thing in the world. It may require all the intuition and creative talent of the world's best minds to see how a single bit of a jigsaw puzzle may just complete a structure and turn a meaningless jumble of facts into a fruitful and beautiful theory.

Far from being able to rely on a machine for this particular purpose, we cannot even rely on men—except, perhaps, for a very few.

Imagine, for example, a crucial scientific discovery, one that completely revolutionizes a major branch of science and supplies elegant answers to key questions that have agitated scientists and philosophers for thousands of years. And suppose, further, that there is but one major flaw in the discovery; one weakness that threatens to make this beautiful discovery worth nothing after all. A continent of scientists is searching desperately for a method of removing the flaw and, behold, the necessary piece of information is unexpectedly discovered by an amateur, and is worked out in full detail, so that the great central theory is complete at last.

Consider, next, that this piece of information, this key, this crux, is carefully placed in the hand of one of the most eminent scientists of the day, one who is bending his every effort to discovering just this piece of information. Now he has "retrieved" it; he has it.

What do you suppose the scientist would do with this information?

There is no need to guess. All that I have just described actually happened a hundred years ago. And in real life, the scientist who came upon the key, contemptuously threw it away and kept on looking (in vain) for that which he had had and had not recognized. No one else found that thrown-away item for thirty-four years!

The great theory to which I have referred is that of "evolution by natural selection" as advanced by the English naturalist, Charles Robert Darwin. This he did in 1859, in his book "The Origin of Species," undoubtedly the most important single scientific work in all the history of the life sciences.

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Ever since the time of the Greek philosophers, there have been scholars who studied the nature of the various species of plants and animals and who had come to feel (sometimes very uneasily) that there was an ordered relationship among all those species; that one species might develop out of another; that several species might have a common ancestry.

The great difficulty at first was that no such evolutionary process was visible in all the history of man, so that if it occurred at all, it must take place with exceeding slowness. As long as mankind believed the earth to be no more than a few thousand years old, evolution was an impossible concept.

In the early 19th Century, however, the conviction grew and strengthened that the earth was not a few thousand years old, but many millions of years old, and suddenly there was time for evolution to take place after all.

But now another problem arose. *Why* should evolution take place? What force drove some primitive antelope-like creature to lengthen its legs and neck and become a giraffe (which, despite its grotesque shape, still plainly revealed, in its anatomy and physiology, its relationship to the world of antelopes). Or why should a primitive four-hoofed creature, no larger than a dog, grow over the eons and lose one toe after another until it became the large one-hoofed creature we know today as the horse.

The first man to supply a reason was the French naturalist, Jean Baptiste de Lamarck. In 1809, he suggested that animals changed because they voluntarily tried to change. Thus, a primitive antelope who dined on the leaves of trees, was apt to find the leaves within easy reach already consumed by himself and his confreres. He would therefore stretch his neck and his legs, and even his tongue, to grasp leaves that were just higher than he could comfortably reach. A lifetime of such exercise would permanently (it seemed to Lamarck) extend the stretched portions just a trifle and the young of such a creature would inherit this slightly increased length of neck and limbs. (This is the doctrine of the "inheritance of acquired characteristics.") The new generation would repeat the process and, very slowly, with the passage of time, the antelope would become a long-legged, long-necked, long-tongued giraffe.

This theory foundered on two points. In the first place, no evidence existed that showed that acquired characteristics could be inherited. In fact, all the evidence that biologists could locate proved just the reverse, that acquired characteristics were *not* inherited.

Secondly, Lamarckism might be conceivable for characteristics that

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could be altered by conscious effort, but what about other characteristics? The giraffe had also developed the novelty of a blotched coat that caused it to blend into the spattered background of light and shadow under the sun-lit trees upon whose leaves it fed. This protective coloration makes it easier for the giraffe to avoid the predatory gaze of the large carnivores. But how did the giraffe develop this specialized and un-antelope-like coloration? Surely it could not have tried to become blotchy and therefore have succeeded in becoming just a trifle blotchier in the course of its life and then have passed on that additional bit of blotch to its young.

It fell to Darwin to supply the correct answer. He spent years worrying about evolution until one day he happened upon a book called "An Essay on the Principle of Population" by an English economist named Thomas Robert Malthus. In this book, Malthus pointed out that the human population increases more rapidly than the food supply and that the population must therefore inevitably be kept down by famine, by the diseases that accompany undernutrition, or by the wars fought by competing groups of human beings, each intent on salvaging for itself a more than fair share of the earth's limited food supply.

And if this held true for mankind, thought Darwin, why not for all living creatures on earth? Each species would multiply until it outran its food-supply, and each would be cut down by hunger, disease, and by the activity of those who preyed upon it, until there was balance between the numbers of the species and the quantity of its food.

But when the species was winnowed out, which individuals would be eliminated? Why, on the whole, reasoned Darwin, those who were less well-adjusted to the life they led. A species that fed by running down its prey, would find that the slowest runners would be the first to starve. If the species avoided danger by hiding, those less capable of efficient concealment would be the first to be eaten. If all were subject to a particular parasite, those that were least resistant would be the first to sicken and die.

In this way, the blind forces of nature would, in each generation, weed out the less well adapted and preserve the better adapted.

The giraffe would not *try* to lengthen its legs and neck, but those that were born with slightly longer legs and neck in the first place would eat better and survive longer—and have more young to inherit their own particular characteristics. In each generation, the longest legs and neck would survive by "natural selection" and the inborn length (*not* the acquired length) would be inherited.

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Again, a giraffe that happened to be born with a blotchier pelt than average would more likely survive so that the blotches would become more pronounced with the generations. It was not necessary for a giraffe to try for blotches. Natural selection would see to it.

And among the four-hoofed creatures ancestral to the modern horse, those who were largest (hence strongest and fleetest) would most easily survive in each generation. And those with the strongest central hoof (and hence with the leg best-adapted, mechanically, for speed) would best survive. In the end, the large one-hoofed horse would be developed.

Darwin's theory created a terrific furore, but the loudest objections were the least crucial, scientifically. Of course, evolution by natural selection offended the religious sensibilities of many men, since it seemed to deny the version of the creation story found in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis. That form of opposition was by far the most dramatic, and culminated in the Scopes trial in Tennessee in 1924. However, this form of opposition played no great role within the realm of science itself.

Among scientists who were ready to accept the fact of evolution, there were still many who were not ready to accept the Darwinian mechanism. Natural selection was a blind, random force and, to many, the thought that the crowning creation of man should be brought about by the unseeing stagger of chance was intellectually repugnant.

Yet within the decade after the publication of Darwin's book, random forces were shown to account for some subtle facts in physics and chemistry. All the physical-chemical properties of gases, for instance, were found to result from the random movements of molecules. Randomness proved respectable and this form of opposition weakened.

However, there remained one objection so insuperable that if it were allowed to stand, it would be the ruin of the entire Darwinian theory. The theory's supporters could only suppose (and hope) that eventually some way out would be found. This objection involved the manner in which variations—the longer neck, the blotchier coat, the stronger hoof—were preserved across the generations.

Darwin pointed out that the variations arose, in the first place, through sheer random effects. In every group of young, in every litter, in every set of seedlings, there were trifling variations; differences in size, color, and every other conceivable characteristic. It was upon these random variations that natural selection would seize.

But how could such variations be passed on from generation to generation so that they would remain in being for a long enough time to allow the very slow workings of natural selection to bring about the

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necessary result? One could not count on a male giraffe with a longer-than-usual neck mating with a female giraffe with a longer-than-usual neck. He would be quite likely to mate with a female with an ordinary neck, but one which happened to be ready and waiting when the male giraffe was ready and willing.

In the same way, a large stallion might very well mate with a small mare; a well-fanged lion with a small-toothed lioness; an intelligent ape with a stupid one.

And what would happen if these unlikes mated? Darwin was a pigeon-fancier and he knew what happened when varieties of pigeon were cross-bred. For that matter, everyone knows what happens when pure-bred varieties of domestic animals are allowed to mate at random. The result is the mongrel; a creature in which the special characteristics of the ancestral varieties are blended into an undistinguished mixture. The sharp blacks and whites turn into a muddy gray.

Well, then, if chance forces produced the variations at birth, other chance forces would see to it that, through indiscriminate mating, those variations would blend and mix and cancel out before ever natural selection could get in its work.

So the theory of natural selection was simply unworkable in the light of the knowledge of Darwin's time. It seemed that despite all that natural selection could do, species must remain middle-of-the-road and unchanging over countless eons. There could be no evolution, then, and yet there indubitably seemed to be evolution.

Some way had to be found out of this dilemma; some way of destroying the paradox. The theory of evolution by natural selection had to be equipped with a driving mechanism that would push it onward.

One of those most intent on finding this driving mechanism was a Swiss botanist named Karl Wilhelm von Nageli, a professor at the University of Munich. He was heir to a 19th Century school of German biologists who called themselves "nature philosophers."

The nature philosophers were a group who believed in the mystic importance of the individual and in the existence of misty and undefined forces particularly associated with life. The German language is particularly well-adapted to a kind of learned professorial prose that resembles a cryptogram to which no key exists, and the nature philosophers could use this sort of language perfectly. If obscurity is mistaken for profundity, then they were profound indeed.

Von Nageli was a perfectly competent botanist as long as he confined himself to making observations and reporting on them. When,

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however, he theorized and attempted to construct vast realms of thought, he produced nothing of value. His books were as thunderous as so many drums, and as empty.

To find a driving mechanism for the Darwinian theory, he went old Lamarck one better and postulated a mysterious inner drive that forced a species onward in change.

In this way, von Nageli could forget the matter of random mating and the blending of characteristics that resulted. In fact, he could forget all concrete evidence and all reality, for he had solved the matter of a driving mechanism by simply assuming that one existed, without ever realizing that he was arguing in a circle.

He maintained that if the individuals of a species started to grow larger with the generations, the unconscious drive within that species would force the individuals to continue to grow larger. It did that because it did that because it did that because it did that. In fact, according to von Nageli, this process (which he called "orthogenesis") would force the species to continue to grow larger even past the point of diminishing returns, so that its oversize would eventually harm it and drive it to extinction.

(Needless to say, no biologist has taken orthogenesis seriously for a long time now.)

Meanwhile, in Brünn, Austria (now Brno, Czechoslovakia) there lived an Augustinian monk named Gregor Johann Mendel. He was far removed from the violent controversy that was then racking the world of biology. He had two interests outside the religious life and these were botany and statistics. With commendable economy, he combined the two by growing pea-plants in the monastery garden, and counting the different varieties he produced.

There are certain advantages to growing pea-plants. First, they are docile creatures who do not resist the interference of man. Mendel could fertilize them in any combination he chose and so could control their pattern of mating with ease. Secondly, he could cause a pea-plant to fertilize itself so that he could simplify matters by dealing with only one parent, rather than two. Finally, he could study individual characteristics that were much simpler than the more noticeable characteristics of, let us say, domestic animals such as dogs and cattle.

In crossing his pea-plants during the 1860's, Mendel came across a number of fascinating effects that proved of prime importance. I'll mention two of them. First, characteristics did *not* blend and mix. Black and white did *not* produce gray.

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When he crossed pea-plants producing green peas with those producing yellow peas, he found that all the seedlings that resulted eventually, produced yellow peas. The peas were not some-yellow-some-green; they were not all yellowish-green. They were all yellow, as yellow as though no green-pea parent had been involved.

Secondly, Mendel discovered that although the green peas had apparently disappeared in the second generation when all the pea-plants produced yellow peas, they reappeared again in the third generation. In that generation, some of the yellow-pea plants produced some seedlings capable of producing green peas and others capable of producing yellow peas.

The deductions drawn from these facts, and from others which Mendel uncovered, are today called the "Mendelian laws of inheritance" and in the century that has passed there has been no reason to change the fundamentals. As Mendel discovered them, so they have remained.

Nor do the Mendelian laws apply only to pea plants, or only to the plant world. If varieties of dogs seem to mongrelize when intermated, it is because so many different characteristics are involved. The cross-bred young will inherit some characteristics from one parent, and some from another so that *as a whole* it will seem intermediate. Each individual characteristic is inherited intact, in one fashion or another.

The Mendelian laws of inheritance provided just the driving mechanism that the Darwinian theory needed. If a desirable characteristic turned up, it would hang on for generation after generation, and remain in full, undiluted force, as the yellow peas did. Even if the characteristic seemed to disappear for a while, as the green peas did, it was not dead but was merely hiding and in the fullness of time it would appear again.

The reasons for all this were not worked out for decades to come, but the *facts* were incontrovertible. Characteristics did *not* blend together into an undistinguished middle-ground as a result of random mating. Instead even the most random mating did not affect the emergence of different characteristics, and upon those characteristics natural selection seized and exerted its force.

But now that Mendel had made his crucial discovery (and he himself by no means recognized its crucial nature, for he was no evolutionist) what was he to do with it?

As he was only an unknown amateur, he felt that the best he could do would be to send his findings to some renowned and near-by botanist. If that botanist were pleased, he could then lend his name and prestige

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to the paper and bring it before the attention of the world. So Mendel sent it to von Nageli.

Von Nageli now had the key finding in his hands. He was the most fortunate (or, at least, he could have been) of all biologists of his generation. Darwin knew about evolution by natural selection but knew nothing about the Mendelian laws of inheritance. Mendel knew about the laws of inheritance but knew nothing about evolution by natural selection.

Only von Nageli, in all the world, was now in a position to know both, put them together and find the first truly workable theory of evolution.

Looking back on it now, that would seem a simple thing to do, but von Nageli did not do it. Instead, he read Mendel's paper with the utmost disdain. It was not merely that Mendel was an unknown and an amateur. It was also true that the paper was full of numbers and ratios in an age when biologists never dealt with mathematics.

Moreover to nature philosophers like von Nageli, the important job of a biologist was the manufacture of windy and abstruse theories. To content one's self with counting pea-plants seemed an idle amusement that could only be childish at best and idiotic at worst.

Von Nageli returned the paper to Mendel with a curt, cold comment to the effect that the contents were not reasonable. Poor Mendel was crushed. He published the paper, in 1866, in the *Proceedings of the Natural History Society of Brünn* (a perfectly respectable periodical but rather obscure and out-of-the-way) and there it remained unsponsored and unnoticed.

Mendel never returned to his botanical work. In part, this was due to his increasing girth. He became stout enough to make it difficult to do the stooping that plant cultivation requires. He also became abbot of the monastery and found himself engaged in complicated controversy with the Austrian government over questions of taxation. However, the crushing rebuff from von Nageli surely helped sour the whole subject of botanical research for him.

Mendel died in 1884 without having any notion that in the future there would be such a thing as "Mendelian" laws. Darwin died in 1882 without ever realizing that the major flaw in his theory had been corrected. And von Nageli died in 1891 never suspecting that he had had the pearl of great price in his hand, and had thrown it away.

Even as von Nageli lay dying, however, a Dutch botanist, Hugo de Vries, was working on the concept that evolution proceeded by jumps, by sudden changes called "mutations."

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De Vries uncovered plants in which new varieties had sprung up, seemingly from nowhere and observed that these new varieties maintained themselves over the generations and did *not* blend in with the other more normal varieties with which they might be crossed.

By 1900, he had worked out the same laws of inheritance that Mendel had. Unknown to de Vries and to each other, two other botanists, a German, Karl Correns, and an Austrian, Erich Tschermak, had reached the same conclusions in that same year.

All three botanists, before publishing their papers, looked through previous work on the subject (they should have done that first) and all three found Mendel's paper in the obscure journal in which it was buried.

It is one of the glories of scientific history that these three men, each of whom had independently made one of the greatest and most important discoveries in biology, immediately relinquished any thought of retaining credit. Each published his work as nothing more than confirmation of a discovery made by an unknown monk a generation earlier.

This was no small sacrifice, as can be shown by the results. Mendel, through the triple relinquishment of credit, is now immortally famous in the history of science and lends his name to the laws of inheritance. De Vries, on the other hand, is famous to a considerably lesser degree, for the development of mutation theory; and as for Correns and Tschermak, they are virtually unknown even to specialists.

We live now at a time in which the livest and most exciting branch of biology is that of genetics, that branch of science that deals with the inheritance of characteristics. Based originally on Mendel's findings, it has broadened into a domain that overlaps the fields of physics and chemistry and now fills the major portion of the new science of "molecular biology."

The science of molecular biology holds the promise of solving, at last, some of the most fascinating problems of life, and knowledge in this field is moving so quickly that no one dares predict where we will be ten years from now.

Where would we be now, then, if there had not been the sad loss of a complete generation of effort between Mendel and de Vries? What if, for those 34 years, men of science had been studying genetic problems instead of wasting time on orthogenesis and such-like trash.

To be sure, 19th Century techniques would not have advanced them very far in that interval, as viewed by present standards, but there would have been some advance, certainly, which would be reflected in a better position for ourselves now.

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But that generation, alas, is lost, and regrets are useless.

And yet we have no reason to suppose it can't happen again. What pair of eyes is gazing right now at a crucial finding, without seeing its significance? What hands are putting it to one side and what mind is closing against it?

We can't tell. We can never tell.

We can only hope that when the marvels of information retrieval put the right item before a man, it is put before the *right* man. —And for human retrieval, no theory and no machinery exists. We can only hope.

Through Time And Space With Ferdinand Feghoot: LIX

In the 28th Century, Ferdinand Feghoot always took passage on spaceships from Argol. Their discipline was rigidly based on Terran naval tradition. Indeed, Argolian law compelled every captain, on assuming command, to identify himself absolutely with some sea-going hero of Earth, actual or legendary. One wore an eye-patch, another a false wooden leg; some carried harpoons, spyglasses, or belaying pins; they wore pea-jackets or gold-braided coats, and uttered such phrases as "Yo-ho-ho!" and "Damn the torpedoes!"

On a trip to Argol itself, Feghoot met a young captain whose *only* peculiarity was his habit of sounding the ship's klaxon several times whenever they made planetfall. He explained that he was warning his crew of temptations aground—as many blasts of the klaxon as there were loose women per thousand of population. Feghoot approved, and was shocked when the captain, on arrival at Argol, was placed in arrest for having no Terran prototype. Gladly undertaking his defense, he explained to the Court about the temptation index and warning.

"And what," sneered the Prosecuting Officer, "has all this to do with the great heroes of Terran seas? Nothing whatever!"

"You are wrong," replied Ferdinand Feghoot. "Throughout your whole fleet this splendid young man is known as Captain Horatio Hornblower!"

—GRENDEL BRIARTON (*with thanks again to John F. Moore*)

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Mrs. Burger's previous story in F&SF (LOVE CHILD, April, 1962) was set principally in Paris, and dealt with the gauzy fabrics of dreams. Her present tale is played far, far from the back-gardens of France, and contains elements of something not far from nightmare. Six stars of a cluster in Taurus are easily seen by the naked eye, and astronomy has made visible hundreds more: but the ancient Greeks, myth-makers to the western world, concerned themselves with only one of those hidden ones. Atlas, they said, had seven daughters, of whom six became the stars of the Pleiades, but the seventh hid herself for sheer shame of having had a mortal lover; and her name, they said, was Merope . . . Watch the show, then, shake off the boredom deep as space itself in a world without death, see the Sisters—how they dance!—and listen to the sardonic cries of the Eh beasts, and to the mournful and solitary roar of the old lion.

THE PLEIADES

by Otis Kidwell Burger

"HURRY, HURRY, HURRY, THE Greatest Show in the Universe . . ." Junior's voice echoing outside; the sussurru of the crowd passing.

"Where'd you put that lipstick?"

"Aniides! my shawl . . . slippers, make up, hot pack, g-string."

Under the sagging contours of the hot little tent, the Pleiades, literally and figuratively the hottest show in the universe, struggled to put itself together. Seven sisters. Only six of them there now, again, for the ten millionth time, maybe; aided by the bustling figure of the dresser, Aniides (eight-armed, and of course chosen for so being) who pushed among them bearing necessary articles, a strange tree-full of gauzy, gaudy feminine garments. But they had had stranger fig-

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ures in that dressing room that had, for who counted how many years now, been set up on so many strange planets.

The lurid carnival lights painted hectic colors across the battered tent; thrust scarlet searchlights into its rents; and, brushing across the rim of jungle, turned across the youthful faces of the crowd, and met in huge kaleidoscopic arcs of color in the night sky above the sprawling fairgrounds.

Before the next tent, the Taanist fire-swaller glowed eerily; born on a near-dark planet, and, like many dark-living creatures, translucent, he thrust his many-colored fires down his throat; all his internal workings, like a glass man's, outlined in cerise, umber, gold. Close by, the old lion roared, and was answered by the Eh, Eh, of two toad-like furry beasts in the next cage. Actually, derision; they were on the payroll, and after the show, played cards with the roustabouts and the other freaks: voluntary freaks, with all human privileges, including the Pill. Only the lion, involuntary beast at every circus since time began, roared out his weariness and anger all alone.

Having finished his preliminary spiel, Junior came rushing in among the frantically dressing Sisters. "Girls, girls. C'mon now, Time. We gotta crowd, and where are you dames as usual, fussin' over your looks." His gloved clown's hands clapped, softened, impatient. Handsome, like all the people those days, but a little short (perhaps why he had aligned himself with the Sisters?), he had exaggerated his defect with immense padding under a shocking-pink-and-green checked suit; a too-small straw boater perched on his head; a huge putty nose. Con man and clown, with sweat and greasepaint like dissolving flesh running down his cheeks, toad-squat in his monstrous costume, he waddled among them, summoning. "Girls, girls . . ."

"Eh, eh," derisively, the beasts outside.

I would have spat on him once, Maia thought. She took her black wig from one of Annides' appendages, and settled it, trembling, over her head and shoulders. I would have spat on a Junior then; a freak. We had all the men in the universe at our feet.

Over and around her mirror, lapping and overlapping like scales of some strange, tired beast, the curling photographs; mementoes of one night stands on how many forgotten bars in almost nameless planets. Frontier bars, pasted together out of odd materials-at-hand, dug out of jungles, deserts, snows; hermetically sealed against alien atmos-

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pheres and lifeforms; but always nostalgically, improbably, recreating from unlikely materials the half-remembered decor of the habitat most familiar to the rough crews of early space ships. Rows of bottles, with gut-searing contents fermented, after patient experiment, from local flora; heads of strange beasts over improvised mirrors of polished metal; the bars themselves made of packed muds, packing cases, trees, and, in one picture, of bone. Here and there, tacked boldly over this littered pictorial tribute to Man's ingenuity, were more presentable photos of longer engagements, in settled towns whose bars boasted genuine wood, and mirrors flown from Home (over what incredible dazzling blackness of space); in these, the Pleiades showed themselves quite clearly.

The Pleiades Stars of a universe, lovely even among a beautiful People, long of hair and leg, their long bodies so breathtaking that they had never needed to bother much with costumes, or talent; it was enough, in those early Frontier towns, for them merely to prance across the stage. For the men, starved by long years, night, eons alone on strange planets, to stare at them. Jam-packed audiences, night after night; and the silence of the audiences like that of space itself.

The Seven Sisters! (Not, of course sisters) black haired, long-limbed, dressed in little but sequins and top hats; prancing like a matched team of trotters, pulling the dubious vanguard of civilization. Descending, as luminous and unlikely and mythical as their starry namesakes, from the empty skies (sky still so new each man remembered it as visceral as hollow hunger, a nameless fear, under his ribs), to dance and show the reality of their flesh to men in make-shift bars across the universe. Life. So strange a habit at best; so unfamiliar here, in alien worlds. To be seen, craved, touched, in that long line of trotting girls.

"Never enough men," Maia articulated, half aloud, through the weight of grease paint. Enough anything, then. She put out her hand, but Aniides had already passed on. Slut. Both Taygete and Electra were screaming for Aniides, the blare of a loudspeaker called the crowd's attention to the beast charmer; now the long wavering wail of his instrument, and the derisive 'Eh, eh' of the beast as they rose to dance.

"You ready?" Junior cried, anxious. "You're fine, great, kids. C'mon. Whatta dames always hang around so long for? . . . we gotta show to do . . ."

Outside the flimsy canvas door, the night roared. Criss-crossing

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lights competing with three silent moons, blare of canned music against the humming edge of jungle, counterpointed by the solitary radio of a clown who'd already finished his act, in the next tent. The too-sweet voiced babble of the crowd. A moan from the old lion.

Alycyone, Maia, Electra, Taygete, Sterope, Celaneo. How many million times thus, in lockstep, brazen under the spotlights, their black sequined cloaks concealing pyramids below painted faces . . . they had pranced out, glittering shadow-selves under Junior's baton. Dazzling grimace-smile across each face. Black top hat. Tantalizing fragment of black-stockinged leg.

A small, disinterested buzz of applause rose from the audience.

"Laydeez and gentlemen." Junior, on his rostrum. "I am here to show you, tonight, the most, the absolutely most amazing and compelling show left in this weary universe. You have all, I am sure, seen girly acts before. (Pause for titter.) They are part of every circus since time began, bless 'em. And these girls, like all of you out there tonight, have been around nearly that long. Well, can they show you anything new? Who can? (Pause for a lower buzz.) Laydeez and gentlemen, I would like to tell you a story. (Slight shifting in audience.) Once, many many years ago, before things were organized as they are now, we all had to take pills. . . . I wonder how many of you remember? (five or six hands). Or else. Well, one day these seven lovely sisters here . . .

Alycyone began to dance, solo. The black cloak whirled up about her legs.

. . ." the toast of a universe, the beautiful, talented Seven Sisters. . . ."

One by one, the other Pleiades whirled slowly after her.

. . . "who spent their lives entertaining our poor boys over in space (and how many of you have ever spent time in a real space station? You'll know what a generous action it was, for these kids) . . . Well, for those of you who don't remember, suppose we stop just a moment, while I show you how it was."

He waved the girls into a cluster at one side.

On the screen outside the tent, the huge 3D picture flashed into sputtering, glowing color; the old picture of Earth, accompanied by Junior's rasping spiel; the 'educational' build up to the act. "Laydeez and gentlemen, you see here a picture of old Mother Earth, in the days when . . ."

The cities, sprawling mile deep over Earth and oceans; a monstrous steel-chrome-glass growth of thrusting spicules and steel spines,

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like the skeletons of extinct microscopic diatoms, ever farther and farther out, into the air, into the rock below. Growing. Like something alive, only there was nothing else alive then, except people, and a few house-pet plants and animals.

I was poor, Maia thought. Raised mostly in a nursery in the Lower East 2nd level at the city's bottom depth; 15 years before I grew up, won a talent show, and was taken up to the 50th level with some other kids to give a show for a producer . . . and saw the sun, the real sun, for the first time. And the stars.

". . . And can you folks imagine what that first look at the stars, the stars from which they took their names, finally, meant to these poor kids?"

What did it do to me? What it did to millions of others. I dreamed of them, as everyone else did, then. They were our only hope. We had the Invention, but not the technical means of spaceflight; and Earth was on the verge of Revolution. The Earth so full already; suicides, hysteria, starvation, everything, but still short of the War we could not afford, for we were then as all-entwined as some monstrous green-growth plant. So that at first, the Invention became almost a religious ceremony, its possibilities being too terrifying to contemplate otherwise. . . . When you became 21, there was a special ceremony; a priest, relatives, cakes, flowers and you were given the Pill, your first full-strength Pill in a sort of casket with velvet lining. Very fancy. Everyone wept. It was a Coming of Age for all time. And after that, you took the Pill every day, and you were immortal. Unless you forgot. And some did. (How many. Unwilling to see older friends, like my sister, born too soon to take the full course of Pills, die . . . or unwilling merely to suddenly take on the full burden of life forever, because when a race has planned as if life has an end, and suddenly, it hadn't . . .)

"Now all of you out there," Junior rasped on, "can't imagine that time, of course. You're all just given an injection at birth; no one need worry about forgetting. It's as sure as birth itself, part of your heritage."

. . . . And then, Maia's thought furring out faintly, picking up the voices, the books, of long ago men; then the real Revolution; the discoveries that open the universe to men. With space ships, the Long Sleep, and Life eternal finally all discovered, Life's new lease came at how long long last. And the pent up rush began; out, away! The black miles opened; new worlds opened; light years and other planets to colonize. And how many died like lemmings, lost, drowned in the dark oceans of no-air; dead asteroids orbiting

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forever in foam-rubber-plastic-food pill tombs around unknown worlds, or forever wandering. But some came home. To other atmospheres, worlds, enough alike to sustain the uneasy habit we call life. And so the frontier towns came into being. Lusty, ravenous for what the men had never thought to see again; life, in its rawest forms; drink, and violence, and girls.

And so the Seven Sisters came into being . . .

The screen sputtered into darkness. The crowd drifted, aimless, before the platform. All arrested at 21, all beautiful from long breeding, they wore not only similar garments (a Greek chlamys, variously fastened, and the same family lineaments) but the same air. Poised, yet settled. Half bored. They had already said to each other whatever individual things they had to say. Childhood's solitudes had long since been annealed in the group. So had the love affairs, rivalries, and intellectual and spiritual adventures. They lived together in perpetual maturity, knowing all secrets about each other (except the minute grass-root changes of temper and mind, except their ultimate destinies), conscious as any communal animal is conscious, of the beings designated to be its mouth, mind, reproductive powers, or outer tendrils.

Drifting and gazing, they rarely touched. Flesh is no different, exciting, or more taboo than mind, to beings of an indefinite lifespan. Philosophers of the past talked of universal mind, transcending earthly, perishable mind; did any speak of universal, eternal flesh? Men clutch what goes quickest; but now flesh and mind, for eternity, were one. There was no longer a need to gratify flesh while it lasted, or to seek immortality for less perishable mind by forging it into books, buildings, ideas. In reaching for eternal life, Man had finally reached only stasis, emptiness, a common shared loneliness.

Yet even ultimate safety breeds its nettles; the liers on beds of physical and spiritual nails, the joiners of the circus, or dangerous expeditions. And, the commentators, the poets. Though most real poets had been reduced (by lack of poetry's necessities; the sense of that brief friction between the individual and time) to pretty, flaccid, involved verses, some still lurked among all the other non-poet revolutionaries . . . life's eternal counter swell; the restless, the questioners, the merely crazy. The now nearly-mute voices of protest and revelation; voices dammed in darkness, in eternal day, and ever ready to break loose.

While the People, cool and silent, merely waited, to be entertained.

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". . . And so one day these kids, who had spent their lives entertaining a universe . . ." Junior adjusted the spotlight, sweating, "Well, one day the space ship on which they were traveling was forced down. Crashed and burned. But by a miracle, all escaped unhurt. Well, almost all. On a green planet, where they could eat and breathe; but it was off the main route. And of course, their pills . . . Ran out. Laydeez and Gentlemen . . ."

Now Alycyone began to whirl again across the small stage, a shrouded pyramid in her black cloak, under the flickering light; the others followed.

A gasp, a ripple spread across the audience. All the beautiful young faces turned, frozen; the shapely bodies in their simple tunics like marble. Greek statues in man's image of the Gods, the immortals watched now from the chorus, as on stage, the Thing, the dread no-more existent prime Taboo, began to unveil itself.

Old Maia began to strip.

The line of prancing girls, following her under the dull light, in their slow wheeling parody of dance, began to strip, too: First the cloaks, then the hats, sailing out over the audience. Now at a slow drum-beat roll, in unison, almost jauntily, off came the wigs. Bruised light glittered on their bald wrinkled skulls; they tapped and turned again; and now with quickened fingers as the music mounted, tugged at bras and g-strings and straps until layer by layer their naked bodies appeared. Sagging, dug-fallen, pot-bellied, veined and scarred, a monstrosity of flesh, so withered and mauled that it was as though time had striped and beaten them with some incredibly fine whip, leaving its imprint in a maze of wrinkles extending from crown to toe down the gross acreage of time-punished and falling flesh. Six crones, six old cronies of Chronos, pinched and bedevilled by their old bedfellow Time, till their carcasses showed the weight of his caresses, their bodies falling grotesquely down around their bones like carelessly anchored stockings; halfway arrested on gravity's inexorable downward way to the grave. And now, off with the face paint and cheek-straps (chap-fallen; now their false teeth out; the whole structure of face sagging into lappets and jowls, the fantastic rumpling of some 700 years of life); denuding themselves finally of the last scrap of false eyelashes and eyebrows. Out of hollow eye-sockets, their Death's eyes stared sadly, grimly, over the stilled carnival.

Somewhere in the audience a baby; there weren't many, reproduction was limited; began to cry: and in the otherwise now total hush the sighing sound of the audience's breath rasped in and out, like the air from one pair of lungs,

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like the wind off a meadow, after a hot day. A loudspeaker nearby crackled suddenly, splitting the hush like the first distant rumble of thunder. Time, held up, suspended forever in grey barren eternity, now crackled for an instant across the frozen mob; sparked between two opposite poles.

. . . "And carking," the loudspeaker said . . . "And carking
Death will find you out
And nibble life up, doubt by doubt . . ."

"And that," Junior began hastily, trying to drown the sound, "is what your new life has saved you from, Laydeez and Gentlemen; the skeleton in the closet, so to speak, that mankind . . ."

". . . And strip the senses, one by one (the loudspeaker went on, ignoring him)
Till sense itself is left undone . . ."

"Shut him up," Junior said.

From the audience, a bearded face rose, detaching itself suddenly; a voice gleefully, powerfully, roared back at the PA,

"And freakish age
Will pull our teeth
And bare the withered
Bone beneath . . ."

"And bed us down . . ." the loudspeaker cackled back.

". . . Safe from stars and skies at last,
To rest
In other springs, on Earth's Warm breast . . ."

Pandemonium. Shouts and jeers. The bearded man went down under a mob, was raised by an opposing mob and brandished like a flag. Someone stifled the loudspeaker in a final squawk; after a brief sound of scuffling, bland carnival music blared forth again.

"Laydeez and gentlemen!"

"Hurrah for death!"

"Laydeez and . . ." Junior, sweating, flung cloaks over the girls, harangued the audience. "Please! Puleez! The show is not over. For those of you who have enjoyed our show, who have found that it has brought new meaning into their lives, there is still . . ."

"Death and liberty for all!"

". . . another part of the show, if you will kindly step this way, for just ten spantans more, the tenth part of a . . ." Sweating, he trundled the box containing the seventh sister into its niche on the side of the tent. "In this box, the sister that unfortunately . . ."

"The people's right! No freedom without death!"

". . . did not survive the crash of the rocket ship. A fascinating and unique specimen, Ladeez and Gentlemen, and the only one of its kind in this universe (will someone shut up the joker out there?), where Death and old age no longer exist, and where everyone has an equal right to *Life*, ladeez and gentlemen, and there is no need for such suffering, as you see here, only to remind you, in this educa-

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tional spectacle, of what mankind had to endure in his Dark Ages."

More than two thirds of the audience came up to file past the narrow coffin, padded in faded stage velvet, where Merope's mummied body lay in state, grinning at the stars; and stood for awhile to shift, perhaps, the weight of eternity from their feet. In another's misfortune, one's own often looks brighter.

The six surviving old women sat back in their tent again, huddled in their cloaks, sipping tea. Life's conscience; spooks, antiques, ghosts, from the world of death and time, they were pensioned by the government. Because of them, the dissenters and poets had been discovered and dispersed.

"Great show tonight, kids," Junior called, trotting past. Merope's coffin had been wheeled into the tent; as he passed, he was now stripping off his putty nose. The crowds had gone home. "Always like to give folks something to make them Think."

The old women did not look up from their tea. Outside, the hard brilliant starlight loomed over the littered darkness of the fairgrounds. Most of the other freaks had gone to bed. But from the poker game two tents down came the faint, derisive eh, eh, echo, of the Eh beasts; and from a nearby cage, the mournful, solitary roar of the old lion.

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Introduction to Israel Zangwill's SATAN MEKATRIG

In Queen Victoria's Golden Days a man just convicted of the most infamous crime on her statute-books was being led from court to prison through a jeering, spitting mob. A young journalist stepped past the police, doffed his hat to the criminal, and bowed. "Zangwill," said Oscar Wilde, "men have entered the Kingdom of Heaven for less . . ." The conservatism of Old World Jewry met its equal in the conservatism of Britain: in three hundred years, the center of Jewish settlement in London moved but a half-mile, from Spitalfield to Whitechapel. The great commemorator of this once teeming half-mile (it was largely destroyed in the War) was Israel Zangwill. His pen dipped not only in inks of black and white to create wonderful chiaroscuro, *but its marvellous colors remain unfaded in their pictures of a world now gone forever. Zangwill's contemporary comedies, popular in their time, are now quite forgotten, and even his scenes of Jewish life are neglected—undeservedly so; they range over three continents and at least as many centuries, and their old-fashioned air of dramatic romanticism may yet reclaim attention jaded by secular "realism." The key-word is perhaps "secular," if Zangwill's Jews were not always observant of their faith, they knew what it was they were neglecting; if "the yoke of Torah" had been thrown from their necks they were keenly aware of its absence. Jewish Orthodoxy and Jewish London—Israel Zangwill did not confine himself to either (his play,* The Melting Pot, *which gave the phrase to the language, takes place in, of all places, Staten Island!), but he always returned to both. It was not Moshe Grinwitz alone who struggled with the* Satan Mekatrig *(the Accusing Adversary . . . in whose title our word "category" is faintly visible: in order to accuse men, Satan was obliged to divide and label them), but Zangwill as well. In his* Children of the Ghetto, Ghetto Tragedies, Ghetto Comedies, Dreamers of the Ghetto, *and* The King of Schnor-

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rers, *it is not always easy to see who beareth away the victory. Rebuffed in his suit of the daughter of a staunchly pious Anglo-Jewish peer, he married out of the faith; and broke with the Zionists in favor of a Jewish Homeland in "Uganda" (actually, Kenya). In his later years—born in 1864, he died in the late Twenties—while on an American lecture tour, an official of the Jewish women's organization he had addressed saw the familiar prominent nose, grey mane, and pince-nez bent over a plate on which was some produce of the Hog-Butcher To The World. Forgetting that her own presence in such a restaurant left her no room for categorizing, she asked, sarcastic, "How do you like our Chicago ham, Mr. Zangwill?" The pince-nez flashed. "Better than I like your Chicago tongue!" said Mr. Zangwill—and was allowed to complete his meal in silence.*

SATAN MEKATRIG

by Israel Zangwill

"Suffer not the evil imagination to have dominion over us . . . deliver me from the destructive Satan."—Morning Prayer.

WITHOUT, THE AIR WAS HOT, heavy and oppressive; squadrons of dark clouds had rolled up rapidly from the rim of the horizon, and threatened each instant to shake heaven and earth with their artillery. But within the little synagogue of the "Congregation of Love and Mercy," though it was crowded to suffocation, not a window was open. The worshippers, arrayed in their Sabbath finery, were too intent on following the quaint monotonous sing-song of the Cantor reading the Law to have much attention left for physical discomfort. They thought of their perspiring brows and their moist undergarments just about as little as they thought of the meaning of the Hebrew words the reader was droning. Though the language was perfectly intelligible to them, yet their consciousness was chiefly and agreeably occupied with its musical accentuation, their piety being so interwoven

From "They That Walk In Darkness," the Macmillan Co., 1899

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with these beloved and familiar material elements as hardly to be separable therefrom. Perspiration, too, had come to seem almost an ingredient of piety on great synagogal occasions. Frequent experience had linked the two, as the poor opera-goer associates Patti with crushes. And the present *was* a great occasion. It was only an ordinary Sabbath afternoon service, but there was a feast of intellectual good things to follow. The great Rav Rotchinsky from Brody was to deliver a sermon; and so the swarthy, eager-eyed, curly-haired, shrewd-visaged cobblers, tailors, cigar-makers, peddlers, and beggars, who made up the congregation, had assembled in their fifties to enjoy the dialectical subtleties, the theological witticisms and the Talmudical anecdotes which the reputation of the Galician Maggid fore-shadowed. And not only did they come themselves; many brought their wives, who sat in their wigs and earrings behind a curtain which cut them off from the view of the men. The general ungainliness of their figures and the unattractiveness of their low-browed, high-cheek-boned, and heavy-jawed faces would have made this pious precaution appear somewhat superfluous to an outsider. The women, whose section of the large room thus converted into a place of worship was much smaller than the men's, were even more closely packed on their narrow benches. Little wonder, therefore, that just as a member of the congregation was intoning from the central platform the blessing which closes the reading of the Law, a woman disturbed her neighbours by fainting. She was carried out into the open air, though not without a good deal of bustle, which invoked indignant remonstrances in the Jüdisch-Deutsch jargon, of "Hush, little women!" from the male worshippers, unconscious of the cause. The beadle went behind the curtain, and, fearing new disturbances, tried to open the window at the back of the little room, to let in some air from the back-yard on which it abutted. The sash was, however, too inert from a long season of sloth to move even in its own groove, and so the beadle elbowed his way back into the masculine department, and by much tugging at a cord effected a small slit between a dusty skylight and the ceiling, neglecting the grumblings of the men immediately beneath.

Hardly had he done so, when all the heavy shadows that lay in the corners of the synagogue, all the glooms that the storm-clouds cast upon the day, and that the grimy, cobwebbed windows multiplied, were sent flying off by a fierce flash of lightning that bathed in a sea of fire the dingy benches, the smeared walls, the dingily curtained Ark, the serried rows of

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swarthy faces. Almost on the heels of the lightning came the thunder —that vast, instantaneous crash which denotes that the electric cloud is low.

The service was momentarily interrupted; the congregation was on its feet; and from all parts rose the Hebrew blessing, "Blessed art thou, O Lord, performing the work of the Creation;" followed, as the thunder followed the lightning, by the sonorous "Blessed art thou, O Lord, whose power and might fill the Universe." Then the congregation, led by the great Rav Rotchinsky, to whose venerable thought-lined face, surmounted by its black cap, all eyes had instinctively turned, sat down again, feeling safe. The blessing was intended to mean, and meant no more than, a reverential acknowledgment of the majesty of the Creator revealed in elemental phenomena; but human nature, struggling amid the terrors and awfulness of the Universe, is always below its creed, and scarce one but felt the prayer a talisman. A moment afterward all rose again, as Moshe Grinwitz, wrapped in his Talith, or praying-shawl, prepared to descend from the *Al Memor*, or central platform, bearing in his arms the Scroll of the Law, which had just been reverentially wrapped in its bandages, and devoutly covered with its embroidered mantle and lovingly decorated with its ornamental bells.

Now, as Moshe Grinwitz stood on the *Al Memor* with his sacred burden, another terrible flash of lightning and appalling crash of thunder startled the worshippers. And Moshe's arms were nervously agitated, and a frightful thought came into his head. *Suppose he should drop the Holy Scroll!* As this dreadful possibility occurred to him he trembled still more. The *Sepher Torah* is to the Jew at once the most precious and the most sacred of possessions, and in the eyes of the "Congregation of Love and Mercy" their *Sepher Torah* was, if possible, invested with a still higher preciousness and sanctity, because they had only one. They were too poor to afford luxuries; and so this single Scroll was the very symbol and seal of their brotherhood; in it lay the very possibility of their existence as a congregation. Not that it would be rendered *"Pasul,"* imperfect and invalid, by being dropped; the fall could not erase any of the letters so carefully written on the parchment; but the calamity would be none the less awful and ominous. Every person present would have to abstain for a day from all food and drink, in sign of solemn grief. Moshe felt that if the idea that had flitted across his brain were to be realized, he would never have the courage to look his pious wife in the face after such passive profanity. The congregation, too, which honoured him, and which

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now waited to press devout kisses on the mantle of the Scroll, on its passage to the Ark—he could not but be degraded in its eyes by so negligent a performance of a duty which was a coveted privilege. All these thoughts, which were instinctively felt, rather than clearly conceived, caused Moshe Grinwitz to clasp the Sacred Scroll, which reached a little above his head, tightly to his breast. Feeling secure from the peril of dropping it, he made a step forward, but the bells jangled weirdly to his ears, and when he came to the two steps which led down from the platform, a horrible foreboding overcame him that he would stumble and fall in the descent. He stepped down one of the steps with morbid care, but lo! the feeling that no power on earth could prevent his falling gained tenfold in intensity. An indefinable presentiment of evil was upon him; the air was charged with some awful and maleficent influence, of which the convulsion of nature seemed a fit harbinger. And now his sensations became more horrible. The conviction of the impending catastrophe changed into a desire to take an active part in it, to have it done with and over. His arms itched to loose their hold of the *Sepher Torah*. Oh! if he could only dash the thing to the ground, nay, stamp upon it, uttering fearful blasphemies, and shake off this dark cloud that seemed to close round and suffocate him. A last shred of will, of sanity, wrestled with his wild wishes. The perspiration poured in streams down his forehead. It was but a moment since he had taken the Holy Scroll into his arms; but it seemed ages ago.

His foot hovered between the first and second step, when a strange thing happened. Straight through the narrow slit opened in the skylight came a swift white arrow of flame, so dazzling that the awed worshippers closed their eyes; than a long succession of terrific peals shook the room as with demoniac laughter, and when the congregants came to their senses and opened their eyes they saw Moshe Grinwitz sitting dazed upon the steps of the *Al Memor*, his hands tightly grasping the ends of his praying-shawl, while the *Sepher Torah* lay in the dust of the floor.

For a moment the shock was such that no one could speak or move. There was an awful, breathless silence, broken only by the mad patter of the rain on the roof and the windows. The floodgates of heaven were opened at last, and through the fatal slit a very cascade of water seemed to descend. Automatically the beadle rushed to the cord and pulled the window to. His action broke the spell, and a dozen men, their swarthy faces darker with concern, rushed to raise up the prostrate Scroll, while

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a hubbub of broken ejaculations rose from every side.

But ere a hand could reach it, Moshe Grinwitz had darted forward and seized the precious object. "No, no," he cried, in the jargon which was the common language of all present. "What do you want? The *mitzvah* (good deed) is mine. I alone must carry it." He shouldered it anew.

"Kiss it, at least," cried the great Rav Rotchinsky in a hoarse, shocked whisper.

"Kiss it?" cried Moshe Grinwitz, with a sneering laugh. "What! with my wife in synagogue! Isn't it enough that I embrace it?" Then, without giving his hearers time to grasp the profanity of his words, he went on: "Ah, now I can carry thee easily. I can hold thee, and yet breathe freely. See!" And he held out the Scroll lengthwise, showing the gilded metal chain and the pointer and the bells contorted by the lightning. "I didn't hurt thee; God hurt thee," he said, addressing the Scroll. With a quick jerk of the hand he drew off the mantle and showed the parchment blackened and disfigured.

A groan burst from some; others looked on in dazed silence. The pecuniary loss, added to the manifestation of Divine wrath, overwhelmed them. "Thou hast no soul now to struggle out of my hands," went on Moshe Grinwitz contemptuously. "Look!" he added suddenly: "The lightning has gone back to hell again!" The men nearest him shuddered, and gazed down at the point on the floor toward which he was inclining the extremity of the Scroll. The wood was charred, and a small hole revealed the path the electric current had taken. As they looked in awestruck silence, a loud wailing burst forth from behind the curtain. The ill-omened news of the destruction of the *Sepher Torah* had reached the women, and their Oriental natures found relief in profuse lamentation. "Smell! smell!" cried Moshe Grinwitz, sniffing the sulphurous air with open delight.

"Woe! woe!" wailed the women. "Woe has befallen us!"

"Be silent, all!" thundered the Maggid, suddenly recovering himself. "Be silent, women! Listen to my words. This is the vengeance of Heaven for the wickedness ye have committed in England. Since ye left your native country ye have forgotten your Judaism. There are men in this synagogue that have shaved the corners of their beard; there are women who have not separated the Sabbath dough. Hear ye! To-morrow shall be a fast day for you all. And you, Moshe Grinwitz, *bench gomel*—thank the Holy One, blessed be He, for saving your life."

"Not I," said Moshe Grinwitz. "You talk nonsense. If the Holy One, blessed be He, saved my life,

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it was He that threatened it. My life was in no danger if He hadn't interfered."

To hear blasphemies like this from the hitherto respectable and devout Moshe Grinwitz overwhelmed his hearers. But only for a moment. From a hundred throats there rose the angry cry, "Epikouros! Epikouros!" And mingled with this accusation of graceless scepticism there swelled a gathering tumult of "His is the sin! Cast him out! He is the Jonah! He is the sinner!" The congregants had all risen long ago and menacing faces glared behind menacing faces. Some of more heady temperament were starting from their places. "Moshe Grinwitz," cried the great Rav, his voice dominating the din, "are you mad?"

"Now for the first time am I sane," replied the man, his brow dark with defiance, his tall but usually stooping frame rigid, his narrow chest dilated, his head thrown back so that the somewhat rusty high hat he wore sloped backward half off his skull. It was always a strange, arrestive face, was Moshe Grinwitz's, with its sallow skin, its melancholy dark eyes, its aquiline nose, its hanging side-curls, and its full, fleshy mouth embowered in a forest of black beard and mustache; and now there was an uncanny light about it which made it almost weird. "Now I see that the Socialists and Atheists are right, and that we trouble ourselves and tear out our very gall to read a *Torah* which the Overseer himself, if there is one, scornfully shrivels up and casts beneath our feet. Know ye what, brethren? Let us all go to the Socialist Club and smoke our cigarettes. Otherwise are *you* mad!" As he uttered these impious words, another flash of flame lit up the crowded dusk with unearthly light; the building seemed to rock and crash; the fingers of the storm beat heavily upon the windows. From the women's compartment came low wails of fear: "Lord, have mercy! Forgive us for our sins! It is the end of the world!" But from the men's benches there arose an incoherent cry like the growl of a tiger, and from all sides excited figures precipitated themselves upon the blasphemer. But Moshe Grinwitz laughed a wild, maniacal laugh, and whirled the sacred Scroll round and dashed the first comers against one another. But a muscular Lithuanian seized the extremity of the Scroll, and others hung on, and between them they wrested it from his grasp. Still he fought furiously, as if endowed with sinews of steel, and his irritated opponents, their faces bleeding and swollen, closed round him, forgetting that their object was but to expel him, and bent on doing him a mischief. Another moment and it would have fared ill with the man, when a voice, whose tones

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startled all but Moshe Grinwitz, though they were spoken close to his ear, hissed in Yiddish: "Well, if this is the way the members of the Congregation of Love and Mercy spend their Sabbath, methinks they had done as well to smoke cigarettes at the Socialist Club. What say ye, brethren?" These words, pregnant and deserved enough in themselves, were underlined by an accent of indescribable mockery, not bitter, but as gloating over the enjoyment of their folly. Involuntarily all turned their eyes to the speaker.

Who was he? Where did he spring from, this black-coated, fur-capped, red-haired hunchback with the gigantic marble brow, the cold, keen, steely eyes that drew and enthralled the gazer, the handsome clean-shaven lips contorted with a sneer? None remembered seeing him enter—none had seen him sitting at their side, or near them. He was not of their congregation, nor of their brotherhood, nor of any of their crafts. Yet as they looked at him the exclamations died away on their lips, their menacing hands fell to their sides, and a wave of vague, uneasy remembrance passed over all the men in the synagogue. There was not one that did not seem to know him; there was not one who could have told who he was, or when or where he had seen him before. Even the great Rav Rotchinsky, who had set foot on English soil but a fortnight ago, felt a stir of shadowy recollection within him; and his corrugated brow wrinkled itself still more in the search after definiteness. A deep and sudden silence possessed the synagogue; the very sobs of the unseeing women were checked. Only the sough of the storm, the ceaseless plash of the torrent, went on as before. Without, the busy life of London pulsed, unchecked by the tempest; within, the little synagogue was given over to mystery and nameless awe.

The sneering hunchback took the Holy Scroll from the nerveless hands of the Lithuanian, and waved it as in derision. "Blasted! harmless!" he cried. "The great Name itself mocked by the elements! So this is what ye toil and sweat for—to store up gold that His words may be inscribed finely on choice parchment; and then this is how He laughs at your toil and your self-sacrifice. Listen to Him no more; give not the seventh day to idleness when your Lord worketh His lightnings thereon. Blind yourselves no longer over old-fashioned pages, dusty and dreary. Rise up against Him and His law, for He is moved with mirth at your mummeries. He and His angels laugh at you—Heaven is merry with your folly. What hath He done for His chosen people for their centuries of anguish and martyrdom? It is for His

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plaything that He hath *chosen* you. He hath given you over into the hand of the spoiler; ye are a by-word among nations; the followers of the victorious Christ spit in your faces. Here in England your lot is least hard; but even here ye eat your scanty bread with sorrow and travail. Sleep may rarely visit your eyes; your homes are noisome styes; your children perish around you; ye go down in sorrow to the grave. Rouse yourselves, and be free men. Waste your lives neither for God nor man. Or, if you will worship, worship the Christ, whose ministers will pour gold upon you. Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow ye die."

A charmed silence still hung over his auditors. Their resentment, their horror, was dead; a waft of fiery air seemed to blow over their souls, an intoxicating flush of evil thoughts held riot in their hearts. They felt their whole spirit move under the sway of the daring speaker, who now seemed to them merely to put into words thoughts long suppressed in their own hearts, but now rising into active consciousness. Yes, they had been fools: they would free themselves, and quaff the wine of life before the Angel of Death, Azrael, spilled the goblet. Moshe Grinwitz's melancholy eyes blazed with sympathetic ardour.

"Hush, miserable blasphemer!" faltered the great Rav Rotchinsky, who alone could find his tongue. "The guardian of Israel neither slumbereth nor sleepeth." The hunchback wheeled round and cast a chilling glance at the venerable man. Then, smiling. "The maidens of England are beautiful," he said. "They are even fairer than the women of Brody."

The great Rav turned pale, but his eyes shone. He struck out feebly with his arms, as though beating back some tempting vision.

"You and I have spoken together before, Rabbi," said the hunchback. "We shall speak again —about women, wine, and other things. Your beard is long and white, but many days of sunshine are still before you, and the darkness of the grave is afar."

The rabbi tried to mutter a prayer, but his lips only beat tremulously together.

"Profane mocker," he muttered at length, "go to thy work and thy wine and thy pleasure, if thou wouldst desecrate the sacred Sabbath-day; but tempt not others to sin with thee. Begone; and may the Holy One, blessed be He, blast thee with His lightnings."

"The Holy One blasteth only that which is holy," grimly rejoined the dwarfish stranger, exhibiting the Scroll, while a low sound of applause went up from the audience. "Said I not, ye were a sport and a mockery unto Him? Ye assemble in your multitude for prayer, and the vapour of your piety but prepares the air for the

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passage of His arrows. Ye adorn His scroll with bells and chains, and the gilded metal but draws His lightnings."

He looked around the room and a cat-like gleam of triumph stole into his wonderful eyes as he noted the effect of his words. He paused, and again for a moment the tense, awful silence reigned, emphasized by the loud but decreasing patter of the rain. This time it was broken in a strange, unexpected fashion.

"Yisgadal, veyiskadash sheme rabbo," rang out a clear, childish voice from the rear of the synagogue. A little orphan child, who had come to repeat the *Kaddish,* the Hebrew mourners' unquestioning acknowledgment of the Supreme Goodness, had fallen into a sleep, overcome by the heat, and had slept all through the storm. Awakening now amid a universal silence, the poor little fellow instinctively felt that the congregation was waiting for him to pronounce the prayer. Alone of the male worshippers he had neither seen the blaspheming hunchback nor listened to his words.

The hunchback's handsome face was distorted with a scowl; he stamped his broad splay-foot, but hearing no verbal interruption, the child, its eyes piously closed, continued its prayer—

"In the world which He hath created. . . ."

"The rain has ceased, brethren," huskily whispered the hunchback, for his words seemed to stick in his throat. "Come outside and I will tell you how to enjoy this world, for world-to-come there is none." Not a figure stirred. The child's treble went unfalteringly on. The stranger hurried toward the door. Arrived there, he looked back. Moshe Grinwitz alone followed him. He hurled the Scroll at the child's head, but the lad just then took the three backward steps which accompany the conclusion of the prayer. The Scroll dashed itself against the wall; the stranger was gone and with him Moshe Grinwitz. A great wave of trembling passed through the length and breadth of the synagogue; the men drew long breaths, as if some heavy and sulphurous vapour had been dissipated from the atmosphere; the child lifted up with difficulty the battered Scroll, kissed it and handed it to his neighbour, who deposited it reverently in the Ark; a dazzling burst of sunshine flooded the room from above, and transmuted the floating dust into the golden shafts of some celestial structure; the Cantor and the congregation continued the words of the service at the point interrupted, as though all the strange episode had been a dream. They did not speak or wonder among themselves at it; nor did the rabbi allude to it in the marvellous exhortation that succeeded the service, save at its close, when

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he reminded them that on the morrow they must observe a solemn fast. But ever afterward they shunned Moshe Grinwitz as a leper; for the sight of him recalled his companion in blasphemy, the atheist and socialist propagandist, who had insidiously crept into their midst, after perverting and crazing their fellow as a preliminary; and the thought of the strange hunchback set their blood tingling and their brain surging with wild fancies and audacious thoughts. The tidings of their misfortune induced a few benevolent men to join in purchasing a new Scroll of the Law for them, and before the Feast of Consecration of this precious possession was well over, the once vivid images of the stormy and disgraceful scene were as shadows in the minds of men not unaccustomed to heated synagogal discussions, and not altogether strangers to synagogal affrays.

"She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life."—Prov. xxxi. 12.

As Moshe Grinwitz followed his new-found friend down the narrow windings that led to his own home, his whole being surrendered itself to the new delicious freedom. The burst of sunshine that greeted him almost as soon as he crossed the threshold of the synagogue seemed to him to typify the new life that was to be his. He drew up his gaunt form to his full height, stiffened his curved shoulders, bent by much stooping over his machine, and adjusted his high hat firmly on his head. It was not a restful, placid feeling that now possessed him; rather a busy ferment of ideas, a stirring of nerve currents, an accumulation of energy striving to discharge itself, a mercurial flowing of the blood. The weight of old life-long conceptions, nay, the burden of old learning, of which his store had been vast, was cast off. He did not know what he should do with the new life that tingled in his veins; he only felt alive in every pore.

"Ha! brother!" he shouted to the hunchback, who was hurrying on before. "These fools in the synagogue would do better to come out and enjoy the fine weather."

"They breathe the musty air to offer it up as a sweet incense," responded the dwarf, slackening his steps to allow his companion to come up with him.

Their short walk was diversified by quite a number of incidents. A driver lashed his horse so savagely that the animal bolted; two children walking hand in hand suddenly began to fight; a foreign-looking, richly dressed gentleman, half-drunk, staggered along. Moshe felt it a shame that one wealthy man should wear a heavy gold chain, which would support

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a poor family for a month; but ere his own temptation had gathered to a head, the poor gentleman was felled by a sudden blow, and a respectably clad figure vanished down an alley with the coveted spoil. Moshe felt glad, and made no attempt to assist the victim, and his attention was immediately attracted by some boys, who commenced to tie a cracker to a cat's tail. Occupied by all these observations, Moshe suddenly noted with a start that they had reached the house in which he lived. His companion had already entered the passage, for the door was always ajar, and Moshe had the impression that it was very kind of his new friend to accept his invitation to visit him. He felt very pleased, and followed him into the passage, but no sooner had he done so than an impalpable cloud of distrust seemed to settle upon him. The house was a tall, old-fashioned and grimy structure, which had been fine, and even stately, a century before, but which now sheltered a dozen families, mainly Jewish. Moshe Grinwitz's one room was situated at the very top, its walls forming part of the roof. Every flight of stairs Moshe went up, his spirit grew darker and darker, as if absorbing the darkness that hung around the cobwebbed, massive balustrades, upon which no direct ray of sunlight ever fell; and by the time he had reached the dusky landing outside his own door the vague uneasiness had changed into a horrible definite conception; a memory had come back upon him which set his heart thumping guiltily and anxiously in his bosom. His wife! His pure, virtuous, God-fearing wife! How was he to make her understand? But immediately a thought came, by which the burden of shame and anxiety was half lifted. His wife was not at home; she would still be in the Synagogue of Love and Mercy, where, mercifully blinded by the curtain, she, perhaps, was still ignorant of the part he had played. He turned suddenly to his companion, and caught the vanishing traces of an ugly scowl wrinkling the high white forehead under the fur cap. The hunchback's hair burnt like fire on the background of the gloom; his eyes flashed lightning.

"Probably my wife is in the synagogue," said Moshe. "If so, she has the key, and we can't get in."

"The key matters little," hissed the hunchback. "But you must first tear down this thing."

Moshe's eyes followed in wonder the direction of his companion's long, white forefinger, and rested on the *Mezuzah,* where, in a tin case, the holy verses and the Name hung upon the door-post.

"Tear it down?" repeated Moshe.

"Tear it down!" replied the

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hunchback. "Never will I enter a home where this superstitious gewgaw is allowed to decorate the door."

Moshe hesitated; the thought of what his wife would say, again welled up strongly within him; all his new impious daring seemed to be melting away. But a mocking glance from the cruel eyes thrilled through him. He put his hand on the *Mezuzah,* then the unbroken habit of years asserted its sway, and he removed the finger which had lain on the Name and kissed it. Instantly another semi-transformation of his thoughts took place; he longed to take the hunchback by the throat. But it was an impotent longing, for when a low hiss of intense scorn and wrath was breathed from the clenched lips of his companion, he made a violent tug at the firmly fastened *Mezuzah.* It was half-loosed from the woodwork when, from behind the door, there issued in clear, womanly tones the solemn Hebrew words:—

"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the council of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful."

It was Rebecca Grinwitz commencing the Book of Psalms, which she read through every Sabbath afternoon.

A violent shudder agitated Moshe Grinwitz's frame; he paused with his hand on the *Mezuzah,* struggled with himself awhile, then kissed his finger again, and, turning to defy the scorn of his companion, saw that he had slipped noiselessly downstairs. A sob of intense relief burst from Moshe's lips.

"Rivkoly, Rivkoly!" he cried hysterically, beating at the door; and in another moment he was folded in the quiet haven of his wife's arms.

"Who told thee it was I?" said Rebecca, after a moment of delicious happiness for both. "I told them not to alarm thee, nor to spoil thy enjoyment of the sermon, because I knew thou wouldst be uneasy and be wanting to leave the synagogue if thou knewest I had fainted."

"No one told me thou hadst fainted!" Moshe exclaimed, instantly forgetting his own perturbation.

"And yet thou didst guess it!" said Rebecca, a happy little smile dimpling her pale cheek, "and came away after me." Then, her face clouding, "The *Satan Mekatrig* has tempted us both away from synagogue," she said, "and even when I commence to say *Tehillim* (Psalms) at home, he interrupts me by sending me my darling husband."

Moshe kissed her in acknowledgement of the complimentary termination of a sentence begun with unquestionable gloom. "But what make my Rivkoly faint?" he

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asked, glad, on reflection, that his wife's misconception obviated the necessity of explanations. "They ought to have opened the window at the back of the women's room."

Rebecca shuddered. "God forbid!" she cried. "It wasn't the heat —it was *that.*" Her eyes stared a moment at some unseen vision.

"What?" cried Moshe, catching the contagion of horror.

"He would have come in," she said.

"Who would have come in?" he gasped.

"The *Satan Mekatrig,*" replied his wife. "He was outside, and he glared at me as if I prevented his coming in."

A nervous silence followed. Moshe's heart beat painfully. Then he laughed with ghastly merriment. "Thou didst fall asleep from the heat," he said, "and hadst an evil dream."

"No, no," protested his wife earnestly. "As sure as I stand here, no! I was looking into my *Chumosh* (Pentateuch), following the reading of the *Torah,* and all at once I felt something plucking my eyes off my book and turning my head to look through the window immediately behind me. I wondered what *Satan Mekatrig* was distracting my thoughts from the service. For a long time I resisted, but when the reading ceased for a moment the temptation overcame me and I turned and saw him."

"How looked he?" Moshe asked in a whisper that strove in vain not to be one.

"Do not ask me," Rebecca replied, with another shudder. "A little crooked demon with red hair, and a fur cap, and a white forehead, and baleful eyes, and a cock's talons for toes."

Again Moshe laughed, a strange, hollow laugh. "Little fool!" he said, "I know the man. He is only a brother-Jew—a poor cutter or cigar-maker who laughs at *Yiddishkeit* (Judaism), because he has no wife like mine to show him the heavenly light. Why, didst thou not see him afterward? But no, thou must have been gone by the time he came inside."

"What I saw was no man," returned Rebecca, looking at him sternly. "No earthly being could have stopped my heart with his glances. It was the *Satan Mekatrig* himself, who goeth to and fro on the earth, and walketh up and down in it. I must have been having wicked thoughts indeed this Sabbath, thinking of my new dress, for my Sabbath Angel to have deserted me, and to let the Disturber and the Tempter assail me unchecked." The poor, conscience-stricken woman burst into tears.

"My Rivkoly have wicked thoughts!" said Moshe incredulously, as he smoothed her cheek. "If my Rivkoly puts on a new dress in honour of the Sabbath, is not the dear God pleased? Why,

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where *is* thy new dress?"

"I have changed it for an old one," she sobbed. "I do not want to see the demon again."

"The *Satan Mekatrig* has no real existence, I tell thee," said Moshe, irritated. "He only means our own inward thoughts, that distract us in the performance of the precepts; our own inward temptations to go astray after our eyes and after our hearts."

"Moshe!" Rebecca exclaimed in a shocked tone, "have I married an Epikouros after all? My father, the Rav, peace be unto him, always said thou hadst the makings of one —that thou didst ask too many questions."

"Well, whether there is a *Satan* or not," retorted her husband, "thou couldst not have seen him; for the person thou describest is the man I tell thee of."

"And thou keepest company with such a man," she answered; "a man who scoffs at *Yiddishkeit!* May the Holy One, blessed be He, forgive thee! Now I know why we have no children, no son to say *Kaddish* after us." And Rebecca wept bitterly—for the children she did not possess.

Their common cause of grief coming thus unexpectedly into their consciousness softened them toward one another and dispelled the gathering irritation. Both had a melancholy vision of themselves stretched out stiff and stark in their shrouds, with no filial *Kaddish* breaking it upon and gladdening their ears. O if their souls should be doomed to Purgatory, with no son's prayers to release them! Very soon they were sitting hand in hand, reading together the interrupted Psalms.

And a deep peace fell upon Moshe Grinwitz. So the immortal allegorist, John Bunyan, must have felt when the mad longing to utter blasphemies and obscenities from the pulpit was stifled; and when he felt his soul once more in harmony with the Spirit of Good. So feel all men who have wrestled with a Being in the darkness and prevailed.

They were a curious contrast—the tall, sallow, stooping, black-bearded man, and the small, keen-eyed, plump, pleasant-looking, if not pretty woman, in her dark wig and striped cotton dress, and as they sat, steadily going through the whole collection of Psalms to a strange, melancholy tune, fraught with a haunting and indescribable pathos, the shadows of twilight gathered unnoticed about the attic, which was their all in all of home. The iron bed, the wooden chairs, the gilt-framed *Mizrach* began to lose their outlines in the dimness. The Psalms were finished at last, and then the husband and wife sat, still hand in hand, talking of their plans for the coming week. For once neither spoke of going to evening service at the Synagogue of Love and Mercy,

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and when a silver ray of moonlight lay broad across the counterpane, and Rebecca Grinwitz, peering into the quiet sky that overhung the turbid alley, announced that three stars were visible, the devout couple turned their faces to the east and sang the hymns that usher out the Sabbath.

And when the evening prayer was over Rebecca produced from the cupboard the plainly cut goblet of raisin wine, and the metal wine-cup, the green twisted wax-light, and the spice-box, wherewith to perform the beautiful symbolical ceremony of the *Havdalah*, welcoming in the days of work, the six long days of dreary drudgery, with cheerful resignation to the will of the Maker of all things—of the Sabbath and the Day of Work, the Light and the Shadow, the Good and the Evil, blent into one divine harmony by His inscrutable Wisdom and Love.

Moshe filled the cup with raisin wine, and, holding it with his right hand, chanted a short majestic Hebrew poem, whereof the burden was:—

"Lo! God is my salvation; I will trust, and I will not be afraid. Be with us light and joy, gladness and honour." Then blessing the King of the Universe, who had created the fruit of the Vine, he placed the cup on the table and took up the spices, uttering a blessing over them as he did so. Then having smelled the spice-box, he passed it on to his wife and spread out his hands toward the light of the spiral wax taper, reciting solemnly: "Blessed be Thou, O Lord, our God, King of Light of the Fire." And then looking down at the Shade made by his bent fingers, he took up the wine-cup again, and chanted, with especial fervour, and with a renewed sense of the sanctities and sweet tranquillities of religion: "Blessed be Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who makest a distinction between the Holy and the non-Holy, between Light and Darkness."

"As for that night, let darkness seize upon it."—Job iii. 6.

It was *Kol Nidre* night, the commencement of the great White Fast, the Day of Atonement. Throughout the Jewish quarter there was an air of subdued excitement. The synagogues had just emptied themselves and everywhere men and women, yet under the solemn shadow of passionate prayer, were meeting and exchanging the wish that they might weather the fast safely. The night was dark and starless, as if Nature partook of the universal mournfulness.

Solitary, though amidst a crowd, a slight, painfully thin woman shuffled wearily along, her feet clad in the slippers which befitted the occasion, her head bent, her

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worn cheek furrowed with still-falling tears. They were not the last dribblets of an exhausted emotion, not the meaningless, watery expression of over-excited sensibility. They were real, salt, bitter tears born of an intense sorrow. The long, harassing service, with its untiring demands upon the most exalted and the most poignant emotions, would have been a blessing if it had dulled her capacity for anguish. But it had not. Poor Rebecca Grinwitz was still thinking of her husband.

It was of him she thought, even when the ministers, in their long white cerements, were pouring forth their souls in passionate vocalization, now rising to a wail, now breaking to a sob, now sinking to a dread whisper; it was of him she thought when the weeping worshippers, covered from head to foot in their praying-shawls, rocked to and fro in a frenzy of grief, and battered the gates of Heaven with fiery lyrics; it was of him she thought when she beat her breast with her clenched fist as she made the confession of sin and clamoured for forgiveness. Sins enough she knew she had—but *his* sin! Ah! God, *his* sin!

For Moshe had gone from bad to worse. He refused to reenter the synagogue where he hal been so roughly handled. His speech became more and more profane. He said no more prayers; wore no more phylacteries. Her peaceful home-life wrecked, her reliance on her husband gone, the poor wife clung to him, still hoping on. At times she did not believe him sane. Gradually rumours of his mad behaviour on the Sabbath on which she had fainted reached her ears, and remembering that his strangeness had begun from the Sunday morning following that delicious afternoon of common Psalm-saying, she was often inclined to put it all down to mental aberration. But then his talk—so clever, if so blasphemous; bristling with little pointed epigrams and maxims such as she had never before heard from him or any one else. He was full of new ideas, too, on politics and the social system and other unpractical topics, picturing endless potentialities of wealth and happiness for the labourer. Meantime his wages had fallen by a third, owing to the loss of his former place, his master having been the president of the Congregation of Love and Mercy. What wonder, therefore, if Moshe Grinwitz intruded upon all his wife's thoughts—devotional or worldly? In a very real sense he had become her *Satan Mekatrig*.

Up till to-night she had gone on hoping. For when the great White Fast comes round, a mighty wave as of some subtle magnetism passes through the world of Jews. Men and women who have not obeyed one precept of Judaism for a whole

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year suddenly awake to a remembrance of the faith in which they were born, and hasten to fast and pray, and abase themselves before the Throne of Mercy. The long-drawn, tremulous, stirring notes of the trumpet that ushers in the New Year, seem to rally and gather together the dispersed of Israel from every region of the underworld of unfaith and to mass them beneath the cope of heaven. And to-night surely the newly rooted nightshade of doubt would wither away in her husband's bosom. Surely this one link still held him to the religion of his fathers; and this one link would redeem him and yet save his soul from the everlasting tortures of the damned. But this last hope had been doomed to disappointment. Utterly unmoved by all the olden sanctities of the Days of Judgment that initiate the New Year, the miserable man showed no signs of remorse when the more awful terrors of the Day of Atonement drew near—the last day of grace for the sinner, the day on which the Divine Sentence is sealed irrevocably. And so the wretched woman had gone to the synagogue alone.

Reaching home, she toiled up the black staircase and turned the handle of the door. As she threw open the door she uttered a cry. She saw nothing before her but a gigantic shadow, flickering grotesquely on the sloping walls and the slip of ceiling. It must be her own shadow, for other living occupant of the room she could see none. Where was her husband? Whither had he gone? Why had he recklessly left the door unlocked?

She looked toward the table gleaming weirdly with its white tablecloth; the tall wax *Yom Kippur* Candle, specially lit on the eve of the solemn fast and intended to burn far on into the next day, had all but guttered away, and the flame was quivering unsteadily under the influence of a draught coming from the carelessly opened window. Rebecca shivered from head to foot; a dread presentiment of evil shook her soul. For years the Candle had burnt steadily, and her life also had been steady and undisturbed. Alas! it needed not the omen of the *Yom Kippur* Candle to presage woe.

"May the dear God have mercy on me!" she exclaimed, bursting into fresh tears. Hardly had she uttered the words when a monstrous black cat, with baleful green eyes, dashed from under the table, sprang upon the window-sill, and disappeared into the darkness, uttering a melancholy howl. Almost frantic with terror, the poor woman dragged herself to the window and closed it with a bang, but ere the sash had touched the sill, something narrow and white had flashed from the room through the gap, and the reverberations made

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in the silent garret by the shock of the violently closed window were prolonged in mocking laughter.

"Well thrown, Rav Moshe!" said a grating voice. "Now that you have at last conquered your reverence for a bit of tin and a morsel of parchment, I will honour your mansion with my presence."

Instantly Rebecca felt a wild longing to join in the merriment and to laugh away her fears; but, muttering a potent talismanic verse, she turned and faced her husband and his guest. Instinct had not deceived her—the newcomer was the hunchback of that fatal Sabbath. This time she did not faint.

"A strange hour and occasion to bring a visitor, Moshe," she said sternly, her face growing even more rigid and white as she caught the nicotian and alcoholic reek of the two men's breaths.

"Your good *Frau* is not overpolite," said the visitor. "But it's *Yom Kippur,* snd so I suppose she feels she must tell the truth."

"I brought him, Rivkoly, to convince thee what a fool thou wast to assert that thou hadst seen —but *I* mustn't be impolite," he broke off, with a coarse laugh. "There's no call for *me* to tell the truth because it's *Yom Kippur.* Down at the club we celebrated the occasion by something better than truth—a jolly spread! And our good friend here actually stood a bottle of champagne! Champagne, Rivkoly! Think of it! Real, live champagne, like that which fizzes and sparkles on the table of the Lord Mayor. Oh, he's a jolly good fellow! and so said all of us, too. And yet thou sayest he isn't a fellow at all."

A drunken leer overspead his sallow face, and was rendered more ghastly by the flame leaping up from the expiring candle.

"*Roshah,* sinner!" thundered the woman. Then looking straight into the cruel eyes of the hunchback, her wan face shining with the stress of a great emotion, her meagre form convulsed with fury, "Avaunt, *Satan Mekatrig!*" she screamed. "Get thee down from my house—get thee down. In God's name, get thee down—to hell."

Even the brazen-faced hunchback trembled before her passion; but he grasped his friend's hot hand in his long, nervous fingers, and seemed to draw courage from the contact.

"If I go, I take your husband!" he hissed, his great eyes blazing in turn. "He will leave me no more. Send me away, if you will."

"Yes, thou must not send my friend away like this," hiccoughed Moshe Grinwitz. "Come, make him welcome, like the good wife thou wast wont to be."

Rebecca uttered a terrible cry, and, cowering down on the

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ground, rocked herself to and fro.

The drunkard appeared moved. "Get up, Rivkoly," he said, with a tremour in his tones. "To see thee one would think thou wast sitting *Shivah* over my corpse." He put out his hand as if to raise her up.

"Back!" she screamed, writhing from his grasp. "Touch me not; no longer am I wife of thine."

"Hear you that, man?" said the hunchback eagerly. "You are free. I am here as a witness. Think of it; you are free."

"Yes, I am free," repeated Moshe, with a horrible, joyous exultation on his sickly visage. The gigantic shadow of himself that bent over him, cast by the dying flame of the *Yom Kippur* Candle, seemed to dance in grim triumph, his long side-curls dangling in the spectral image like barbaric ornaments in the ears of a savage, while the unshapely, fantastic shadow of the hunchback seemed to nod its head in applause. Then, as the flame leaped up in an irregular jet, the distorted shadow of the Tempter interwined itself in a ghastly embrace with her own. With frozen blood and stifled breath the tortured woman turned away, and, as her eyes fell upon the many-cracked looking-glass which adorned the mantelpiece, she saw, or her overwrought fancy seemed to see—her husband's dead face, wreathed with a slavering serpent in the place of the phylacteries he had ceased to wear, and surrounded by endless perspectives of mocking marble-browed visages, with fiery snakes for hair and live coals for eyes.

She felt her senses slipping away from her grasp, but she struggled wildly against the heavy vapour that seemed to choke her. "Moshe!" she shrieked, in mad, involuntary appeal for help, as she clutched the mantel and closed her eyes to shut out the hideous vision.

"I am no longer thy husband," tauntingly replied the man. "I may not touch thee."

"Hear you that, woman?" came the sardonic voice of the hunchback. "You are free. I am here as a witness."

"I am here as a witness," a thousand mocking voices seemed to hiss in echoed sibilance.

A terrible silence followed. At last she turned her white shrunken face, which the contrast of the jet-black wig rendered weird and death-like, toward the man who had been her husband, and looked long and slowly, yearningly yet reproachfully, into his blood-shot eyes.

Again a great wave of agitation shook the man from head to foot.

"Don't look at me like that, Rivkoly," he almost screamed. "I won't have it. I won't see thee. Curse that candle! Why does it flicker on eternally and not blot thee from my sight?" He puffed

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violently at the tenacious flame and a pall fell over the room. But the next instant the light leaped up higher than ever.

"Moshe!" Rebecca shrieked in wild dismay. "Dost thou forget it is *Kol Nidre* night? How canst thou dare to blow out a light? Besides, it is the *Yom Kippur* Candle—it is our life and happiness for the New Year. If you blow it out, I swear, by my soul and the great Name, that you shall never look upon my face again."

"It is because I do not wish to see thy face that I will blow it out," he replied, laughing hysterically.

"No, no!" she pleaded. "I will go away rather. It is nearly dead of itself; let it die."

"No! It takes too long dying; 'tis like thy father, the Rav, yho had the corpse-watchers so long in attendance that one died himself," said Moshe Grinwitz with horrible laughter. "I will kill it!" And bending down low over the broad socket of the candlestick, so that his head loomed gigantic on the ceiling, he silenced forever the restless tongue of fire.

Immediately a thick blackness, as of the grave, settled upon the chamber. Hollow echoes of the blasphemer's laughing rang and resounded on every side. Myriads of dreadful faces shaped themselves out of the gloom, and moved and gibbered at the woman. At the window, the green, baleful eyes of the black cat glared with phosphorescent light. A wreath of fiery serpents twisted themselves in fiendish contortions, shedding lurid radiance upon the cruel marble brow they garlanded. An unspeakable Eeriness, an unnameable Unholiness, floated with rustling pinions through the Darkness.

With stifling throat that strove in vain to shriek, the woman dashed out through the well-known door, fled wildly down the stairs, pursued at every step by the sardonic merriment, met at every corner by the gibbering shapes—fled on, dashing through the heavy, ever-open street door into the fresher air of the night—on, instinctively on, through the almost deserted streets and alleys, where only the vile ginhouses gleamed with life—on, without pause or rest, till she fell exhausted upon the dusty door-step of the Synagogue of Love and Mercy.

"All Israel have a portion in the world to come."—Ethics of the Fathers.

The aged keeper of the synagogue rushed out at the noise.

"Save me! For God's sake, save me, Reb Yitzchok!" cried the fallen figure. "Save me from the *Satan Mekatrig!* I have no home—no husband. Take me in!"

"Take you in?" said Reb Yitzchok pityingly, for he dimly guessed something of her story.

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"Where can I take you in? You know my wife and I are allowed but one tiny room here."

"Take me in!" repeated the woman. "I will pass the night in the synagogue. I must pray for my husband's soul, for he has no son to pray for him. Let me come in! Save me from the *Satan Mekatrig!*"

"You would certainly meet many a *Satan Mekatrig* in the streets during the night," said the old man musingly. "But have you no friends to go to?"

"None—none—but God! Let me in that I may go to Him. Give me shelter, and He will have mercy on you when the great *Tekiah* sounds to-morrow night!"

Without another word Reb Yitzchok went into his room, returned with the key, and threw open the door of the women's synagogue, revealing a dazzling flood of light from the numerous candles, big and little, which had been left burning in their sconces. The low curtain that served as a partition had been half rolled back by devoted husbands who had come to inquire after their wives at the end of the service, and the synagogue looked unusually large and bright, though it was hot and close, with lingering odours of breaths, and snuff, and tallow, and smelling-salts.

With a sob of infinite thankfulness Rebecca dropped upon a wooden bench.

"Would you like a blanket?" said the old man.

"No, no, God bless you!" she replied. "I must watch and weep, not sleep. For the Scroll of Judgment is written and the Book of Life is all but closed."

With a pitying sigh the old man turned and left her alone for the night in the Synagogue of Love and Mercy.

For a few moments Rebecca sat, prayerless, her soul full of a strange peace. Then she found herself counting the chimes as they rolled out sonorously from a neighbouring steeple: One, Two, Three, Four, Five, Six, Seven, Eight, Nine, Ten, Eleven, TWELVE!

Starting up suddenly when the last stroke ceased to vibrate on the air, Rebecca Grinwitz found, to her surprise, that a merciful sleep must have overtaken her eyelids, that hours must have passed since midnight had struck, and that the great Day of Atonement must have dawned. Both compartments of the synagogue were full of the restless stir of a praying multitude. With a sense of something vaguely strange, she bent her eyes downward on her neighbour's *Machzor*. The women immediately pushed the prayer-book more toward Rebecca, with a wonderful smile of love and tenderness, which seemed to go right through Rebecca's heart, though

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she could not clearly remember ever having seen her neighbour before. Nor, wonderingly stealing a first glance around, could she help feeling that the entire congregation was somewhat strange and unfamiliar, though she could not quite think why or how. The male worshippers, too, why did they all wear the shroud-like garments, usually confined on this solemn occasion to the ministers and a few extra-devout personages? And had not some transformation come over the synagogue? Was it only the haze before her tear-worn eyes or did dim perspectives of worshippers stretch away boundlessly on all sides of the clearly seen area, which still retained the form of the room she knew so well?

But the curious undercurrent of undefined wonder lasted but a moment. In another instant she was reconciled to the scene. All was familiar and expected; once more she was taking part in divine service with no sorrowful thoughts of her husband coming to distract her, her whole soul bathing in and absorbing the Peace of God which passeth all understanding. Then suddenly she felt a stir of recollection coming over her, and a stream of love warming her heart, and looking up at her neighbour's face she saw with joyous content that it was that of her mother.

The service went on, mother and daughter following it in the book they had in common. After several hours, during which the huge, far-spreading congregation alternated with the Cantor in intoning the beautiful poems of the liturgy of the day, the white curtain with its mystic cabalistic insignia was rolled back from the Ark of the Covenant and two Scrolls were withdrawn therefrom. Rebecca noted with joy that the Ark was filled with Scrolls big and little, in rich mantles, and that those taken out were swathed in satin beautifully embroidered, and that the ornaments and the musically tinkling bells were of pure gold.

Then some of the worshippers were called up in turn to the *Al Memor* to be present at the reading of a section of the Law. They were all well known to Rebecca. First came Moses ben Amram. He walked humbly up to the *Al Memor* with bowed head, his long *Talith* enveloping him from crown to foot. Rebecca saw his face well, for though it was covered with a thick veil, it shone luminously though its draping.

"Bless ye the Lord, who is blessed," said Moses ben Amram, the words seeming all the sweeter from his lips for the slight stammering with which they were uttered.

"Blessed be the Lord, who is blessed to all eternity and beyond," responded the endless con-

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gregation, in a low murmur that seemed to be taken up and vibrated away and away into the infinite distances for ever and ever.

"Blessed be the Lord, who is blessed to all eternity and beyond," echoed the melodious voice. Then, in words that seemed to roll and fill the great gulfs of space with a choral music of sacred joy, Moses continued, "Blessed be Thou, O Lord, our God, the King of the Universe, who hath chosen us from all peoples, and given unto us His Law. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who givest the Law."

After him came Aaron ben Amram, whose white beard reached to his kness. Abraham ben Terah, Isaac ben Abraham, and Jacob ben Isaac—all venerable figures, with faces which Rebecca felt were radiant with infinite tenderness and compassion for such poor helpless children as herself—were also called up, and after the Patriarchs, Elijah the Prophet. Lastly came a white-haired, stooping figure, whose gait and whose every gesture told Rebecca that it was her father. How glad she felt to see him thus honoured! As she listened to his quavering tones the dusty tombstones of dead years seemed rolled away, and all their simple joys and griefs to live again, not quite as of yore, but transfigured by some solemn pathos.

When the reading of the Law was at an end, David ben Jesse, a royal-looking graybeard, held up the Scroll to the four corners of space, and it was rolled up by his son Solomon, the Preacher; the carrying of it to the Ark being given to Rabbi Akiba, whose features wore a strange, ecstatic look, as though ennobled by suffering. The vast multitude rose with a great rustling, the sound whereof reached afar, and sang a hymn of rejoicing, so that the whole universe was filled with melody. Rebecca alone could not sing. For the first time she missed her husband, Moshe. Why was he not here, like all the other friends of her life, whose beloved faces surrounded her on every side and made a sweet atmosphere of security for her soul? What was he doing outside of this mighty assembly? Why was he not here to have the sacred duty of carrying the Scroll entrusted to him? She felt the tears pouring down her cheeks. She was ready to sink to the earth with sudden lassitude. "Mother! dear mother!" she cried, "I feel so faint."

"You must have some air, my child, my Rivkoly," said the mother, the dearly remembered voice falling for the first time with ineffable sweetness on Rebecca's ears. And she put out her hand, and lo! it grew longer and longer, till it reached up to the skylight, and then suddenly the whole roof vanished and the free air of heav-

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en blew in like celestial balm upon Rebecca's hot forehead. Yet she noted with wonder that the holy candles burnt on steadily, unfluttered by the refreshing breeze. And then, lo! the starless heavens above her opened out in indescribable Glory. The Dark budded into ineffable Beauty; a supernally pure, luminous Splendour, transcendently dazzling, filled the infinite depths of the Firmament with melodious coruscations of Infinite Love made visible, and white-winged hosts of radiant Cherubim sang "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts, the whole earth is full of His Glory." And all the vast congregation fell upon their faces and cried "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts, the whole earth is full of His Glory." And Moses ben Amram arose, and he lifted his hands toward the Splendour and he cried, "Lord, Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and full of kindness and truth. Lo, Thou sealest the seals before the twilight. Seal Thy People, I pray Thee, in the Book of Life, though Thou blot me out. Forgive them, and pardon their transgressions for the sake of the merits of the Patriarchs and for the sake of the merits of the Martyrs, who have shed their blood like water and offered their flesh to the flames for the Santification of the Name. Forgive them, and blot out their transgressions."

The congregation said "Amen."

Then a surging wave of hope rose within Rebecca's breast, and it lifted her to her feet and stretched out her arms toward the Splendour. And she said: "Lord God, forgive Thou my husband, for he is in the hand of the Tempter. Save him from the power of the Evil One by Thine outstretched arm and Thy mighty hand. Save him and pardon him, Lord, in Thine infinite mercy." Then a strange, dread, anxious silence fell upon the vast spaces of the Firmament, till from the heart of the Celestial Splendour there fell a Word that floated through the Universe like the sweet blended strains of all sweet instruments, a Word that mingled all the harmonies of winds and waters and mortal and angelic voices into one divine cadence—*Salachti.*

And with the sweet Word of Forgiveness lingering musically in her charmed ears, and the sweet assurance at her heart that she, the poor, miserable tailor's wife, despised and trodden under foot by the rich and by the heathen around, could lean upon the breast of an Almighty Father, who had prepared for her immortal glories and raptures amid all her loved ones in a world where He would wipe the tears from off all eyes, Rebecca Grinwitz awoke to find the bright morning sunshine streaming in upon her and the fresh morning air blowing in upon

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her fevered brow from the skylight which Reb Yitzchok had just opened.

"Surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler."—Psalm xci. 3.

A shroud of newly fallen snow enveloped the dead earth, over which the dull, murky sky looked drearily down. Within his fireless garret, which was almost empty of furniture, Moshe Grinwitz lay, wasted away to a shadow. His beard was unkempt, his cheek-bones were almost fleshless, his feverish eyes large and staring, his side-curls tangled and untended. There did not seem enough strength left in the frame to resist a babe; yet, when he coughed, the whole skeleton was agitated as though with galvanic energy.

"Will he never come back?" he murmured uneasily.

"Fear not; so far as lies in my power, I shall be with you always," replied the voice of the hunchback as he entered the room. "But, alas! I have little comfort to bring you. One pawnbroker after another refused to advance anything on my waistcoat, and at last I sold it right out for a few pence. See; here is some milk. It is warm."

Moshe tried to clutch the jug, but fell back, helpless. A shade of anxiety passed over his companion's face. "Have I miscalculated?" he muttered. He held the jug to the sick man's lips, supporting his head with the other. Moshe drank, then fell back, and pressed his friend's hand gratefully.

"Poor Moshe," said the hunchback. "What a shame I tossed into the gutter the gold my father left me seven months ago! How could I foresee you would be struck down with this long sickness?"

"No, no, don't regret it," quavered Moshe, his white face lighting up. "We had jolly old times, jolly old times, while the money lasted. Oh, you've been a good friend to me—a good friend. If I had never known you, I should have passed away into nothingness, without ever having known the mad joys of wine and riot. I have had wild, voluptuous moments of revelry and mirth. No power in heaven or hell can take away the past. And then the sweet freedom of doing as you will, thinking as you will, flying with wings unclogged by superstition—to you I owe it all! And since I have been ill you have watched over me like—like a woman."

His words died away in a sob, and then there was silence, except when his cough sounded strange and hollow in the bare room. Presently he went on:—

"How unjust Rivkoly was to you! She once said"—here the speaker laughed a little melancholy laugh—"that you were the *Satan Mekatrig* in person."

"Poor afflicted woman!" said

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his friend, with pitying scorn. "In this nineteenth century, when among the wise the belief in the gods has died out, there are yet fools alive who believe in the devil. But she could only have meant it metaphorically."

The sick man shook his head. "She said the evil influence—of course, it seemed evil to her—you wielded over her thoughts, and I suppose mine, too, was more than human—was supernatural."

"Oh, I don't say I'm not more strong-minded than most people. Of course I am, or I should be howling hymns at the present moment. But why does a soldier catch fire under the eye of his captain? What magnetism enables one man to bewitch a nation? Why does one friend's unspoken thought find unuttered echo in another's? Go to Science, study Mesmerism, Hypnotism, Thought-Transference, and you will learn all about Me and my influence."

"Yes, Rivkoly never had any idea of anything outside her prayer-book. Rivkoly—"

"Mention not her name to me," interrupted the hunchback harshly. "A woman who deserts her husband—"

"She swore to go if I blew out the *Yom Kippur* light. And I did."

"A woman who goes out of her wits because her husband gets into his!" sneered the other. "Doubtless her superstitious fancy conjured up all sorts of sights in the dark. Ho! ho! ho!" and he laughed a ghastly laugh. "Happily she will never come back. She's evidently able to get along without you. Probably she has another husband more to her pious taste."

Moshe raised himself convulsively. "Don't say that again!" he screamed. "*My* Rivkoly!" Then a violent cough shook him and his lips were reddened with blood.

The cold eyes of the hunchback glittered strangely as he saw the blood. "At any rate," he said, more gently, "she cannot break the mighty oath she sware. She will never come back."

"No, she will never come back," the sick man groaned hopelessly. "But it was cruel of me to drive her away. Would to G—"

The hunchback hastily put his hand on the speaker's mouth, and tenderly wiped away the blood. "When I am better," said Moshe, with sudden resolution, "I will seek her out: perhaps she is starving."

"As you will. You know she can always earn her bread and water at the cap-making. But you are your own master. When you are rid of this sickness—which will be soon—you shall go and seek her out and bring her to abide with you." The words rang sardonically through the chamber.

"How good you are!" Moshe murmured, as he sank back relieved.

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The hunchback leaned over the bed till his gigantic brow almost touched the sick man's, till his wonderful eyes lay almost on his. "And yet you will not let me hasten on your recovery in the way I proposed to you."

"No, no," Moshe said, trembling all over. "What matters if I lie here a week more or less?"

"Lie here!" hissed his friend. "In a week you will lie rotting."

A wild cry broke from the blood-bespattered lips! "I am not dying! I am not dying! You said just now I should be better soon."

"So you will; so you will. But only if we have money. Our last farthing, our last means of raising a farthing, is gone. Without proper food, without a spark of fire, how can you hold out a week in this bitter weather? No, unless you would pass from the light and the gladness of life to the gloom and the shadow of the tomb, you must be instantly baptized."

"*Shmad* myself! Never!" said the sick man, the very word conjuring up an intolerable loathing, deeper than reason; and then another violent fit of coughing shook him.

"See how this freezing atmosphere tells on you. You must take Christian gold, I tell you. Thus only shall I be able to get you fire —to get you fire," repeated the hunchback with horrible emphasis. "You call yourself a disbeliever. If so, what matters? Why should you die for a miserable prejudice? But you are no true infidel. So long as you shrink from professing any religion under the sun, you still possess a religion. Your unfaith is but foam-drift on the deep sea of faith; but lip-babble while your heart is still infected with superstition. Come, bid me fetch the priest with his crucifix and holy water. Let us fool him to the top of his bent. Rouse yourself; be a man and live."

"No, no, brother! I will be a man and die."

"Fool!" hissed the hunchback. "It fits not one who has lived for months by Christian gold to be so nice."

"You lie!" Moshe gasped.

"The seven months that you and I have known each other, it is Christian gold that has warmed you and fed you and rejoiced you, and that, melted down, has flowed in your veins as wine. Whence, then, took I the money for our riotings?"

"From your father, you said."

"Yes, from my spiritual father," was the grim reply. "No, having that belief, which *you* still lack, in the hollowness and mockery of all save pleasure, I became a Christian. For a time they paid me well, but as soon as I had been put on the annual report I had served my purpose and the supplies fell off. I could be converted again in another town or country,

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but I dare not leave you. But you are a new man, and should I drag you into the fold they will reward us both well. Instead of subsisting on ary bread and milk you will fare on champagne and turtle-soup once more."

Moshe sat up and gazed wildly one long second at the Tempter. He looked at his own fleshless arms, and shuddered. He felt the icy hand of Death upon him. He knew himself a young man still. Must he go down into the eternal darkness, and be folded in the freezing clasp of the King of Terrors, while the warm bosom of Life offered itself to his embrace? No; give him Life, Life, Life, polluted and stained with hypocrisy, but still Life, delicious Life.

The steely eyes of the hunchback watched the contest anxiously. Suddenly a change came over the wildly working face—it fell back chill and rigid on the pillow, the eyes closed. The room seemed to fill with an impalpable, brooding Vapour, as if a thick fog were falling outside. The watcher caught madly at his friend's wrist and sought to detect a pulsation. His eyes glowed with horrible exultant relief.

"Not yet, not yet, Brother Azrael," he said mockingly, as if addressing the impalpable Vapour; "Thou who art wholly woven of Eyes, canst Thou not see that it is not yet time to throw the fatal pellet into his throat? Back, back!"

The Vapour thickened. The minutes passed. The hunchback peered expectant at the corpse-like face on the dingy pillow. At last the eyes opened, but in them shone a strange, rapt expression.

"Thank God, Rivkoly!" the dying lips muttered. "I knew thou wouldst come."

As he spoke there was a frantic beating at the door. The hunchback's face was convulsed.

"Hasten, hasten, Brother Azrael!" he cried.

The Vapour lightened a little. Moshe Grinwitz seemed to rally. His face glowed with eagerness.

"Open the door! open the door!" he cried. "It's Rivkoly—my Rivkoly!"

The vain battering at the door grew fiercer, but none noted it in the house. Since the shadow of the hunchback had first fallen within that thickly crowded human nest, the doves had becomes hawks, the hawks vultures. All was discord and bickering.

"Lie still," said the hunchback; " 'tis but your fevered imagination. Drink."

He put the jug to the dying man's lips, but it was dashed violently from his hand and shattered into a hundred pieces.

"Give me nothing bought with Christian money!" gasped Moshe hoarsely, his breath rattling painfully in his throat. "Never will I knowingly gain by the denial of the Unity of God."

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"Then die like a dog!" roared the hunchback. "Hasten, Brother Azrael!"

The Vapour folded itself thickly about the room. The rickety door was shaken frantically, as by a great gale.

"Moshe! Moshe!" shrieked a voice. "Let me in—me—thy Rivkoly! In God's name, let me in! I bring thee a precious gift. Or art thou dead, dead, dead? My God, why didst Thou not cause me to know he was ill before!"

"Your husband is dying," said the hunchback. "When he is dead, you shall look upon his face. But he may not look upon your face again. You have sworn it."

"Devil!" cried the fierce voice of the woman. "I swore it on *Kol Nidre* night, when I had just asked the Almighty to absolve me from all rash oaths. Let me in, I tell you."

"I will not have a sacred oath treated thus lightly," said the hunchback savagely. "I will keep your soul from sin."

"Cursed be thou to eternity of eternities!" replied the woman. "Pray, Moshe, pray for the soul. Pray, for thou art dying."

"Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one," rose the sonorous Hebrew.

"Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one," wailed the woman. The very Vapour seemed to cling round and prolong the vibrations of the sacred words. Only the hunchback was silent. The mocking words died on his lips, and as the woman, with one last mighty blow, dashed in through the flying door, he seemed to glide past her and melt into the darkness of the staircase.

Rivkoly heeled not his contorted, malignant visage, crowned with its serpentine wreath of fiery hair; she flew straight through the heavy Vapour, stooped and kissed the livid mouth, read in a moment the decree of Death in the eyes, and then put something small and warm into her husband's fast chilling arms.

"Take it, Moshe," she cried, "and comfort thy soul in death. 'Tis thy child, for God has at last sent us a son. *Yom Kippur* night now six long months ago—I had a dream that God would forgive thee, and I was glad. But when I thought to go home to thee in the evening, I learnt that thou hadst been feasting all that dread Day of Atonement with the *Satan Mekatrig;* and my heart fell, for I knew that my dream was but the vain longing of my breast, and that though thine own misguided soul thou couldst never be saved from the eternal vengeance. Then I went away, far from here, and toiled and lived hard and lone; and I believed not in my dream. But I prayed and prayed for thy soul, and lo! very soon I was answered; for I knew we should have a child. And then I entreated that

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it should be a son, to pray for thee, and perhaps win thee back to God, and to say the *Kaddish* after thee when thou should come to die, though I knew not that thy death was at hand; and a few weeks back the Almighty was gracious and merciful to me, and I had my wish."

She ceased, her wan face radiant. The Shadow of Death could not chill her sublime faith, her simple, trustful hope. The husband was clasping the feebly whimpering babe to his frozen breast, and showering passionate kisses on its unconscious form.

"Rivkoly!" he whispered, as the tears rolled down his cheeks, "how pale and thin thou art grown! O God, my sin has been heavy!"

"No, no," she cried, her loving hand in his. "It was the *Satan Mekatrig* that led thee astray. I am well and strong. I will work for our child, and train it up to pray for thee and to love thee. I have named it Jacob, for it shall wrestle with the Recording Angel and shall prevail."

The hue of death deepened on Moshe Grinwitz's face, but it was overspread by a divine calm.

"Ah, the good old times we had at the *Cheder* in Poland," he said. "The rabbi was sometimes cross, but we children were always in good spirits; and when the Rejoicing of the Law came round it was such fun carrying the candles stuck in hollowed apples, and gnawing at your candlestick as you walked. I always loved *Simchath Torah,* Rivkoly. How long is it to the Rejoicing?"

"It will soon be here again, now Passover is over," she said, pressing his hand.

"Is *Pesach* over?" he said mournfully. "I don't remember giving *Seder.* Why didst thou not remind me, Rivkoly? It was so wrong of thee. Thou knowest how I loved the sight of the table—the angels always seemed to hover about it. *Chad Gadyah! Chad Gadyah!*" he commenced to sing in a cracked, hoarse whisper. The child burst into a wail. "Hush, hush, Yaankely," said the mother, taking it to her breast.

"A—a—ah!" A wild scream rose from Moshe Grinwitz's lips. "My *Kaddish!* Take not away my *Kaddish!*" He sat up, with clammy, ghastly brow, and glared with sightless eyes, his arms groping. A thin stream of blood oozed from his mouth.

"Hear, O Israel!" screamed the woman, as she put her hand to his mouth to stanch the blood.

He beat her back wildly. "Not thee! I want not thee! My *Kaddish!*" came the mad, hoarse whisper. "I have blasphemed God! Give me my *Kaddish!* give me my *Kaddish!*"

She put the child into his arms, and he clutched it in his dying frenzy. As he felt its feeble form,

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the old divine peace came over his face. The babe's cries were hushed in fear. The mother was dumb and stony. And silently the Vapour crawled in sluggish folds through the heavy air.

But in a moment the silence was broken by a deep, stertorous rattle. Moshe Grinwitz's head fell back; his arms relaxed their hold of his child, which was caught with a wild cry to its mother's bosom. And the dark Vapour lifted, and showed the three figures to the baleful, agonized eyes of the hunchback at the open door.

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There have been complaints in some circles that The Magazine has not been publishing enough wholesome stories. Struck to our very vitals by this charge (which is probably true), we hasten to make amends. The story following is as wholesome as they come, and if this doesn't satisfy the critics we wash our hands of the whole affair. It is by the well-known travel authority and merry-andrew, Don White of London, author of "Eril, Ethel, Maude, Zelda, Kitty, Tulip and Vanessa and the Leprechaun" (you'll never see it here). Happy landings on a chocolate bar!

PEGGY AND PETER GO TO THE MOON

by Don White

"HURRY, PEGGY! HURRY, PETER!" said Nanny. "It is nearly time to go to the moon!"

Nanny helped Peter on with his new red mittens. "Is the moon really made of green cheese, Nanny?" He was only nineteen and a little backward, so Nanny only smiled.

"Here comes cook with the sandwiches," cried Peggy.

Cook's apple-dumpling face broke into a rare smile at the sight of the two excited children. "Ah, the loves," she said. "I've made your favourites. Red caviar for you, Miss Peggy. . . ."

"Oh, thank you, cook," Peggy turned to Nanny, "Nanny, nanny, why can't cook come with us to the moon?"

"Ah, the little loves," said cook, then went on, "and for you, master Peter, a real treat. Curried Negombo *guni* shrimps. Isn't that a surprise? And Mary-Anne has made you both a thermos of hot Bonox and Rum."

At last they were all ready to go. How smart Peggy and Peter looked in their new red mittens, their new patent leather saddle shoes. Peggy was wearing her mink-collared gold lame party frock, the one that she hadn't worn since Rosemary Jane's party celebrating the defection of her father to the Russians. Peter was

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wearing his new slim-styled raw silk Ivy League romper suit.

Peter was full of excited questions all the way to the secret Rocket Range in Kensington Gardens, but Nanny just boxed his ears, playfully.

A big sign on the barbed-wire gate of the Rocket Range said TOP SECRET—NO ENTRY. In a sentry box stood a stern looking guard.

Peter stood on the back seat of the Rolls Royce and saluted as they drove through, like a real soldier.

Peggy grew suddenly sad, and snuggled into the crook of Nanny's arm. "Oh, dear Nanny, how I shall miss you on the moon. When I grow up, I want to be just like you and wear black lace underwear from France and carry a pearl-handled Smith and Wesson .22 in my handbag."

The Rolls Royce pulled up silently in front of Professor Love's research laboratory. Professor Love was waiting at the door to meet them.

"Ah, here are my little Loves," he said, with a kiss for Peter, and a man-to-man handshake for Peggy.

"Are you coming to the moon with us, daddy?" asked Peter.

He smiled at his only son. "Not this trip, Peterkins. Perhaps next time."

Nanny smiled, and said, "now don't cry, Peggy. Sit quietly, like good children, while daddy finalises the launching arrangements and I'll pour us all a brandy and soda."

"Mine with water, please, Nanny," said Peter, "soda makes my tummy gurgle," and they all laughed.

Professor Love returned to the room. "I think we're all ready to go now," he said, and led the procession onto the Secret Rocket Range.

"Oh, look at the rocket!" cried Peter, jumping up and down with excitement.

The Professor opened a door in the tail fin of the spaceship. "Today you will learn some of the secrets of the great void beyond the atmosphere of earth," he told them, earnestly. "Have they got clean hankies, Nanny?" He went on, "at the top of the steel ladder is a small cabin, with just room for you both. On the wall you will see a big red button, which you must press, and then the rocket will take you all the way to the moon." He pressed the two children to him. "Goodbye, my Loves," he said.

"Goodbye, Daddy," said Peter and Peggy. "Goodbye, Nanny!"

"Wait a minute," said Nanny. "Why in the excitement you almost forgot your sandwiches."

They all laughed. Then with an extra special hug for Nanny, Peggy and Peter climbed the steel ladder into the rocket.

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Professor Love clanged the metal door shut, and he hurried Nanny away from the danger of the blast-off.

Ten seconds later, the silver rocket lifted on a cushion of flame, hovered momentarily, and then shot upwards, into the sky, quicker than the eye could follow.

"Are you sure there is no air on the moon," said Nanny.

"Shut up, and kiss me quick," said the Professor. "There's no air at all. Now, one more kiss and let us hurry to Messrs. Bryce, Bryce, Bridges and Bryce, the lawyers."

"Are you sure the late Mrs. Love's trust fund for the children will now revert to us?"

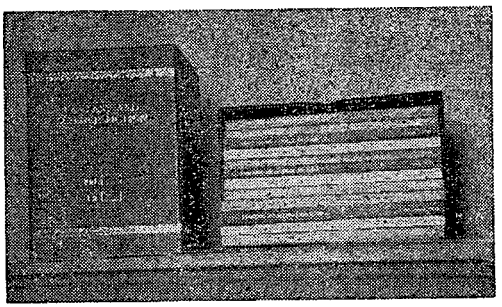
"Stop fretting, Zelda, my dove. I'm as sure of it as I am sure of the fact that Peggy and Peter will never return from the moon, nor the late Mrs. Love from Mars. No, not ever."

An hour later, the Professor's Rolls Royce drew up outside the offices of Bryce, Bryce, Bridges and Bryce, the lawyers.

"Now you pop along and get your manicure and cold perm, and don't forget to meet me at the Savoy for cucumber sandwiches and tea. We'll just have time before the flight leaves to Rio de Janeiro."

"Oh, professor," cried Zelda the ex-nanny, "what a wonderful life we'll have together, just you and I . . . at first! I mean, well, you do want children, don't you?"

"Of course," said the Professor.



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EDITORIAL

Spurred on by a note from Carol Carr, wife to Terry (in its turn, stimulated by Karen Anderson's *Landscape with Sphinxes*, Nov., 1962), we agreed to give our readers the inside story on *The* Sphinx who was, as we put it in our introduction, ". . . sometimes given to the asking of riddles." To begin with, she felt deprived of Love. "I swear, Aggie"—her name was Agapemone—her pappa used to say; "I just don't know who you *take* after. Your Maw was the puttiest she-Sphinx in Thebes." Which same used to reply to her questions with, "Lawk-a-mussy, child, don't bother me. Can't you see that I'-a-combing of my mane?" Thus alienated, Agapemone sought counsel of a wise old Harpy (actually, she was senile). "A man is not captivated by mere physical beauty, O Sphinx-child," commented the w. o. H. "Whut a man like, he like a gal whut kin talk clever." Like for instance what?" Agapemone demanded. "Ohhhh . . ." the wise old (but actually senile) Harpy said, preening her shabby feathers for mites, "Um, well, a, you might axe a riddle or two. They's *al*-ways in style." "Like for instance, *what*?" Agapemone demanded. Well, the Harpy gave her a couple of the hairiest old chestnuts going, and Aggie sat herself down at the crossroads hoping for a quick pick-up. Along came a man heading for Delphi to get a good number to play. "Hey Man, why does a hoplite wear red cross-garters?" "I'll go along with the gag—why?" asked the man. "To keep his sandals on!" Aggie answered, with a giggle and a snort. "You got a bad breath, sister," said the man. So she ate him, moodily. As everybody is aware, food= love. Owing to limitations of space (some universes are more finite than others) the True Version of how The Sphinx conquered her weight problem and found Real Give-Love and Take-Love will have to await another time. Meanwhile, eat lots of green vegetables and red meat and keep on buying this Magazine.

—Avram Davidson

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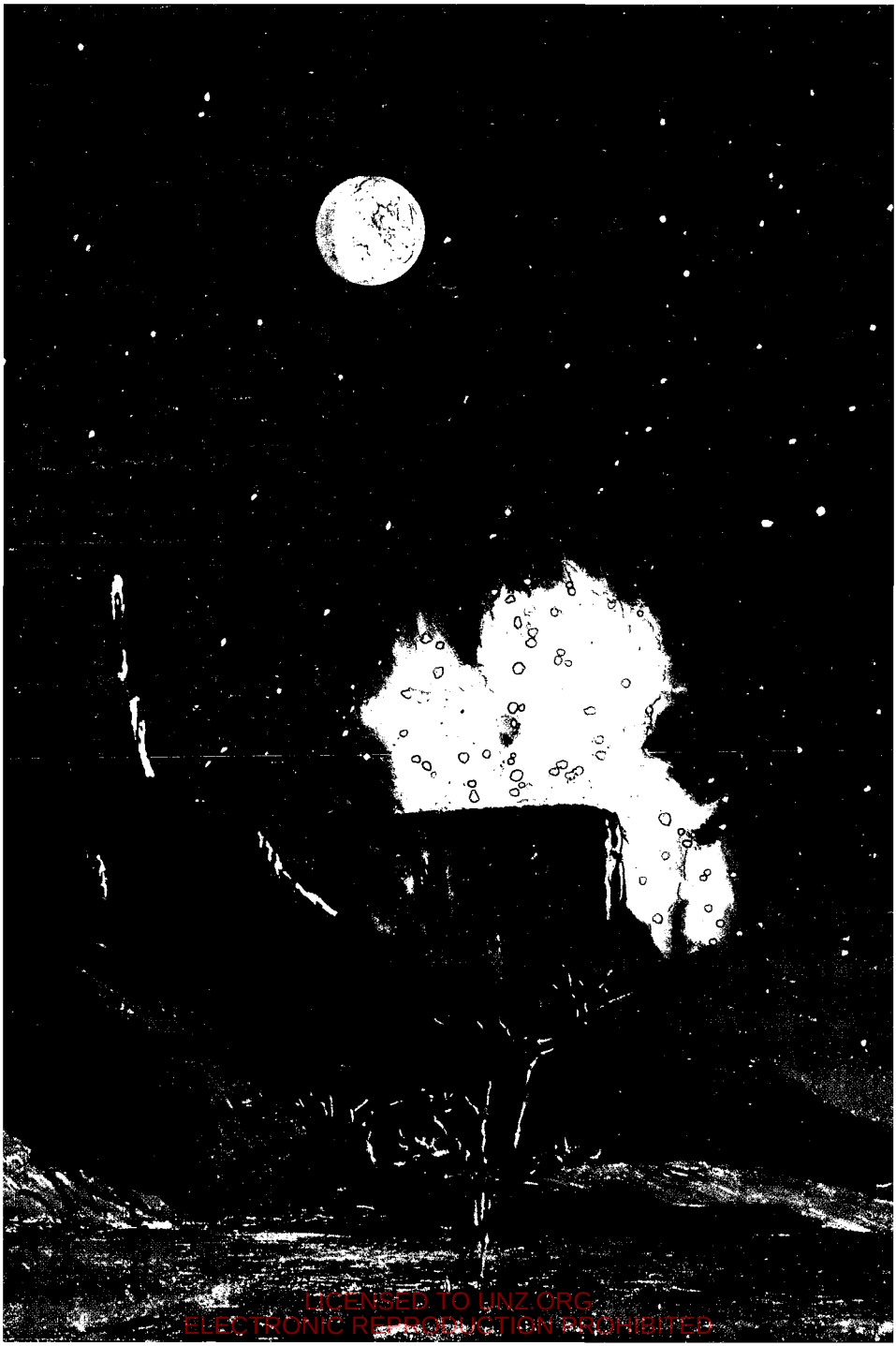

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